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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PERSONAL EVALUATION AND RETROSPECT

Up to a short time ago the contrary seemed to be the case with me. Though not seven cities were involved, I still remember a man saying with authority about me: 'And if he were Mozart himself, he must get out!'

But now, after having acquired the honour of American citizenship, another honour has come to me: the Mayor, His Excellency, General Dr. Theodor Körner and the Senate der Stadt Wien have conferred upon me the Ehrenbürgerrecht der Stadt Wien. It is perhaps superfluous to state that this honour makes me extremely happy and that I am proud that it is this city for whose love and recognition I would make my greatest sacrifice.

That I have reached this goal now is abundant and generous reward as well as an unexpected one. While I vow here with artistic allegiance to the place from which my music originated, and all my knowledge, I have to confess that, in order to do this, I had to forget that I had planned it differently.

And now, your Excellency, let me thank you and the Mayor of Vienna and its Senate again for the great honour and joy your generous action has given me.

October 23, 1949

HOW ONE BECOMES LONELY
1937

My Verklärte Nacht, written before the beginning of this century—hence a work of my first period, has made me a kind of reputation. From it I can enjoy (even among opponents) some appreciation which the works of my later periods would not have procured for me so soon. This work has been heard, especially in its version for orchestra, a great many times. But certainly nobody has heard it as often as I have heard this complaint: 'If only he had continued to compose in this style!'

The answer I gave is perhaps surprising. I said: 'I have not discontinued composing in the same style and in the same way as at the very beginning. The difference is only that I do it better now than before; it is more concentrated, more mature.'
HOW ONE BECOMES LONELY

Of course, if one who knows only Verklärte Nacht is confronted suddenly and without any preparation with music of my present style, he may well be perplexed. This shock may also be felt in comparing a few measures of Verklärte Nacht with some of my Third String Quartet (see Exs. 1 and 2).

The difference might not be so sharp if one compared soft melodies, although it seems obvious that the melody of Verklärte Nacht is easier to understand than that of the string quartet. But justice asks that we compare part of a more violent expression, and for this purpose I choose a part from Verklärte Nacht which, at the time of the first performance of this work (1901), sounded so rough that people said: 'It sounds as if an orchestra playing Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde had become confused and mixed up.'

Note here the use of the pizzicati.
This should be compared with a part of my Fourth String Quartet which uses almost similar means.
The expression and the mood is different, but I am sure that, in 1903, instead of distinguishing between the expression of these examples, the audience would have found only a similarity and would have called both of them 'very, very rough'.

As long as an audience is not inclined to like a piece of music, it does not matter whether there happen to be, besides some more or less rough parts, also smooth or even sweet ones. And so the first performance of my Verklärte Nacht ended in a riot and in actual fights. And not only did some persons in the audience utter their opinions with their fists, but critics also used their fists instead of their pens. So one wrote: 'This sextet seemed to me like a calf with six feet, such as one sees often at a fair.' Six feet, he said, because there were six players. But he forgot that six players possess twelve feet. And he also forgot that in this piece there also appeared parts of which everyone, even at this time, could have approved—as, for example; Ex. 5 Verklärte Nacht, 231–39.
And one might be astonished that even the very end of this piece impressed neither these critics nor the audience.

It may be easily understood that a composer who knows what he has written and feels that he has been treated very badly becomes a little bit suspicious of this kind of criticism. Why, one might ask himself, why did they mention only what they did not like and forget what pleased them? Could they not even have admitted that the eyes of this calf with six feet were nice looking? Or that its hide showed a lovely colour? Why did they speak exclusively about the six feet? Six feet on a calf might be an outstanding feature. But in a sextet it is not surprising that there should be six or even twelve feet.

But see: an artist treated in this way becomes not only suspicious, but even rebellious. Seeing that even parts of undoubted beauty could not protect him, knowing that those parts which were found ugly could not be wrong because he would not have written them if he himself had not liked them, and remembering the judgement of some very understanding friends and experts in musical knowledge who have paid tribute to his work, he becomes aware that he himself is not to blame.
Today it seems perhaps unbelievable that my friend did not recognize the melodies in songs like these two. Of course, the designation melody does not involve an aesthetic value. There are good melodies and poor ones; one is original, the other commonplace; one is appealing, the other indifferent. And it may happen that a good recitative will show more emotional power, and sometimes even more inventive capacity, than many a melody. But knowing I had written melodies and feeling that they were not poor, I had the choice either of being discouraged or of doubting my friend's authority.

I decided not to be discouraged. But I had to wait for more than thirteen years before, in 1913, at the first performance of Ga-relieder in Vienna, the audience affirmed my stubbornness by applauding at the end of the performance for about half an hour.

As usual, after this tremendous success I was asked whether I was happy. But I was not. I was rather indifferent, if not even a little angry. I foresaw that this success would have no influence on the fate of my later works. I had, during these thirteen years, developed my style in such a manner that, to the ordinary concert-goer, it seemed to bear no relation to all preceding music. I had had to fight for every new work; I had been offended in the most outrageous manner by criticism; I had lost friends and I had completely lost any belief in the judgement of friends. And I stood alone against a world of enemies.

Alone, with one exception: that small group of faithful friends, my pupils, among them my dear friend Anton von Webern, the spiritual head of the group, a very Hotspur in his principles, a real fighter, a friend whose faithfulness can never be surpassed, a real genius as a composer. He is today recognized the world over among musicians, although his works at the present time have not yet become as familiar to the great audience as his genius deserves. Among them also was Alban Berg, one of the dearest to me, whose death we deplored in 1935. He gained worldwide fame through his opera, Wozzeck, which was played in every important musical centre; he, too, was a most faithful friend to me. There were and still are many others of reputation among them. It was a fact which has always made me proud, and for many years beyond those thirteen years they were my only moral support in the struggle for my work.

While today one inclines perhaps to count in my favour the fact that I was surrounded by pupils of talent and genius, in 1910 I was merely blamed for that. I was called a 'seducer of young people', and when a critic once compared me
with Socrates I was not sure whether he intended to honour me or to suggest that I should be condemned like Socrates and given the cup of poison. The mildest form of rebuke for the devotion of my pupils to my music was ridicule. When, for example, my First String Quartet was played at a festival of music in Dresden in 1906, the performance provoked the same tremendous scandal that it had at its first performance a few months before in Vienna. Ten of my pupils had made the trip to Dresden to attend the performance. But as two friends of mine were generally with us besides my ten pupils, a malicious musician found a way to ridicule us by calling us 'Schoenberg and his twelve apostles'.

This First String Quartet played an important role in the history of my life. On the one hand, the scandals provoked by it were so widely reported that I was known at once to a considerable part of the public. Of course, I was primarily regarded as the Satan of modernistic music; but, on the other hand, many of the progressive musicians became interested in my music and wanted to know more about it. And in this way a slogan was produced which by mistake was attributed to me. It became a custom in similar cases to say: 'He has made a succès de scandale—a success out of failure.'

One would not believe today that the best musicians and even friends of mine, who had some esteem for my musicianship, misjudged my music very badly. But I must admit that in 1906 the music sounded confusing to the ears of my contemporaries and that the score also offered enigmas. So when I showed the First String Quartet to Gustav Mahler, the great Austrian composer and conductor, at that time head of the Imperial Opera in Vienna, he said: 'I have conducted the most difficult scores of Wagner; I have written complicated music myself in scores of up to thirty staves and more; yet here is a score of not more than four staves, and I am unable to read them.' It is true the score looked, if possible, even more complicated to the eyes than it sounded to the ears, especially passages such as the following:
What made it so difficult to understand in 1905 was its complicated contrapuntal style. And the most embarrassing circumstance was that the harmonies produced by those independently moving parts changed so fast and were so advanced that the ear could not follow their meaning.

Again, as with *Friede Nacht*, parts of understandable smoothness could not calm down the public or reassure them. Two examples of such parts follow. The first one is a section of the Adagio part of this quartet in one movement [see Ex. 7 in *Heart and Brain in Music*, p. 70. Ed.]. The other example occurs at the very end of the work:
The excitement of the audiences at first performances of new compositions of mine was growing greater from work to work. Every now and then, when I believed it could not be surpassed, I discovered that it could. But, in my memory, one of the worst occasions was in connection with my Second String Quartet. The public listened to the first movement without any reaction, either pro or con. But as soon as the second movement, the Scherzo, began, a part of the audience started to laugh at some figures which seemed curious to them and they continued with bursts of laughter at many places during this movement.

A scherzo is the kind of music which should provoke gaiety. And so I could have understood a kind of smile when, as in the next example, I combined my
came to understand that such rejection was based on my musical ideas and the way I expressed them. Something happened during the rehearsals of this work by the Rosé Quartet which was as strange as it was significant. To explain the phrasing of a certain section, I said, "Please, would you not try to play this melody so and so?" A dear friend of mine, who had attended all the rehearsals and was therefore supposed to know the work thoroughly and who, I hoped, understood it, asked, with an air of sincerity and astonishment: "I hear you talking about a melody; where is there a melody at all?" The section in question was the following (see Ex. 2 in 'Heart and Brain in Music', p. 57. Ed.).

If a friend, after hearing it so often, did not conceive this as a melody, why should the audience be able to understand it after only one hearing? So I should have foreseen that also my next work, the *Kammer symphonie*, would not have the success which I had expected. But I had enjoyed so much pleasure during the composing, everything had gone so easily and seemed to be so convincing, that I was sure the audience would react spontaneously to the melodies and to the mood and would find this music to be as beautiful as I felt it to be. And besides, I expected much from the sound of the extraordinary combination of 15 solo instruments—that is, five strings, eight woodwinds and two horns.

After having finished the composition of the *Kammer symphonie*, it was not only the expectation of success which filled me with joy. It was another and a more important matter. I believed I had now found my own personal style of composing and that all problems which had previously troubled a young composer had been solved and that a way had been shown out of the perplexities in which we young composers had been involved through the harmonic, formal, orchestral and emotional innovations of Richard Wagner. I believed I had found ways of building and carrying out understandable, characteristic, original and expressive themes and melodies, in spite of the enriched harmony which we had inherited from Wagner. It was as lovely a dream as it was a disappointing illusion. I had started a second *Kammer symphonie*. But after having composed almost two movements, that is, about half of the whole work, I was inspired by poems of Stefan George, the German poet, to compose music to some of his poems and, surprisingly, without any expectation on my part, these songs showed a style quite different from everything I had written before. And this was only the first step on a new path, but one beset with thorns. It was the first step towards a style which has since been called the style of "atonality". Among progressive musicians it
aroused great enthusiasm. New sounds were produced, a new kind of melody appeared, a new approach to expression of moods and characters was discovered. In fact, it called into existence a change of such an extent that many people, instead of realizing its evolutionary element, called it a revolution. Although the word revolution had not, at this time (about 1907), exclusively the ominous political flavour which is attributed to it today, I always insisted that the new music was merely a logical development of musical resources. But of what use can theoretical explanations be, in comparison with the effect the subject itself makes on the listener? What good can it do to tell a listener, 'This music is beautiful', if he does not feel it? How could I win friends with this kind of music?

In fact, I could not, and I did not expect to win friends. And I may tell you frankly that much as I liked the compositions I wrote at this time, I was equally afraid to have them submitted to the public. And I even hesitated to show them to people other than my closest friends.

But then two of my new works caused a complete change in the situation: my Harmonielehre (Theory of Harmony), published in 1911, and Pierrot Lunaire, a cycle of poems declaimed with the accompaniment of chamber orchestra. Until then, I had been considered only a destroyer, and even my craftsmanship had been doubted, in spite of the many works of my first period. The Harmonielehre endowed me with the respect of many former adversaries who hitherto had considered me a wild man, a savage, an illegitimate intruder into musical culture. These same people were forced now to realize that they were wrong. They had to acknowledge that none of the slurs they had cast on me could be justified. Far from having no background, or a poor one, I had, on the contrary, been brought up in the Brahmanic culture; far from ignoring the works of the classic masters, I paid them profound respect and knew and understood the masterworks at least as well as my enemies; far from knowing little about the technical requirements of composing, I could explain them in a new and very instructive manner. And perhaps the greatest surprise may have been the fact that my Harmonielehre did not speak very much about 'atavism' and other prohibited subjects but almost exclusively about the technique and harmony of our predecessors, wherein I happened to appear even stricter and more conservative than other contemporary theorists. But just because I was so true to our predecessors, I was able to show that modern harmony was not developed by an irresponsible fool, but that it was the very logical development of the harmony and technique of the masters.

It was as embarrassing to my opponents as it was encouraging to my pupils and followers, whose number had already increased astonishingly. And so I approached rather rapidly the first climax when Pierrot Lunaire gave me a great success by the novelty which it offered in so many respects. I must apologize for writing without modesty about my successes. But as I have written sincerely about my failures, I may perhaps be forgiven on the assumption that I am trying to act on my own behalf as an historian.

As soon as these two successes were followed by the aforementioned performance of my Gurrelieder in 1913, the public had to realize that my music was not without emotional power. Because of this change, a different type of judgement now came into use when my works were reviewed. Almost every review at this time began: 'One may think whatever one likes about Schoenberg . . .', and usually continued: 'But one must admit his sincerity.' To receive appreciation for my sincerity was of much value to a man in my position, but it is somewhat inadequate for a composer who believes in his work, and who aims for more than this moral support. And so I became annoyed as often as I read this, and said: 'They think about me what they like, but I want them to think what I like.'

Success comes in waves; and thus, after this climax, I sank into the depression between waves. It was the war which made people think differently about modern music. But as soon as the war was over, there came another wave which procured for me a popularity unsurpassed since. My works were played everywhere and acclaimed in such a manner that I started to doubt the value of my music. This may seem like a joke, but, of course, there is some truth in it. If previously my music had been difficult to understand on account of the peculiarities of my ideas and the way in which I expressed them, how could it happen that now, all of a sudden, everybody could follow my ideas and like them? Either the music or the audience was worthless.

While the music proved to be lasting, these audiences were unstable. As suddenly as they had turned their favour to me and had procured me a popularity which was not consistent with my style, and which always seemed to me unsound, the same audiences made another turn and became hostile towards my music. This was the time when everybody made believe he understood Ehrstein's
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theories and Schoenberg’s music. And the reaction was more justified than the action. Through this turn in the mind of the public, I became for the first time in my life really lonely. This happened in 1924. I had just started to lend my new works an improved kind of structural continuity in introducing what I called the ‘method of composing with twelve tones’, when suddenly public opinion began to forget the emotional power of everything I had written before. Pierrot Lunaire, the First and Second String Quartets, Gurrelieder, and even Verklärte Nacht were forgotten, and I was called by some critics a mere constructor. By this term they wished to imply that I did not write instinctively, and that my music was dry and without emotional expression. By others, in contrast, I was accused of exactly the opposite crime: I was called an old-fashioned romanticist, and my style of expression was blamed for expressing personal feelings. Still others called me a decadent bourgeois, while one group called me Bolshevist. So I seemed to unite within myself every possible contrast: I was too dry and too sweet; I was a constructor and a romanticist; I was an innovator and I was old-fashioned; I was a bourgeois and a Bolshevist.

Though the reasons my opponents gave for their opposition to my music were ridiculous, though their arguments were as confused as possible, since I could not be at one time myself and my own opposite, and though I could laugh about such nonsense, nevertheless, on the other hand, the unanimity of the rebuke was frightening. It was frightening to such an extent that even among some of my pupils an uncertainty appeared and some of them turned to the new fashions of composing which were promoted by the different composers of the so-called New Music. It was the first time in my career that I lost, for a short time, my influence on youth. This took place between 1922 and 1929, and during this time almost every year a new kind of music was created and that of the preceding year collapsed. It started with the European musicians imitating American jazz. Then followed ‘Machine Music’ and ‘New Objectivity’ (Neue Sachlichkeit) and ‘Music for Every Day Use’ (Gebrauchsmusik) and ‘Play Music’ or ‘Game Music’ (Spieldurst) and finally ‘Neo-classicism’. While all this happened and so many styles developed and passed away, I did not enjoy my splendid isolation very cheerfully. Although I soon realized the confusion among my opponents and although I saw with regret that many a great talent would perish through a corrupt attitude towards the arts, which aimed only for a sensational but futile success, instead of fulfilling the task of every artist; al-

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though I knew I was right and that they were wrong, I felt lonely during this period in which I was restricted to the faithfulness of the above-mentioned small number of pupils, among whom I should not forget to include my four friends in the Kolisch Quartet. One of the accusations directed at me maintained that I composed only for my private satisfaction. And this was to become true, but in a different manner from that which was meant. While composing for me had been a pleasure, now it became a duty. I knew I had to fulfil a task: I had to express what was necessary to be expressed and I knew I had the duty of developing my ideas for the sake of progress in music, whether I liked it or not; but I also had to realize that the great majority of the public did not like it. However I remembered that all my music had been found to be ugly at first; and yet... there might be a surprise such as is depicted in the final chorus of my Gurrelieder. There might come the promise of a new day of sunlight in music such as I would like to offer to the world.  

October 11, 1937

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1946

Balzac in his philosophical story Saraphita describes one of his characters as follows: ‘Wilfred was a man thirty years of age. Though strongly built, his proportions did not lack harmony. He was of medium height as is the case with almost all men who tower above the rest. His chest and his shoulders were broad and his neck was short, like that of men whose heart must be within the domain of the head.’

No doubt all those who supposedly create cerebrally—philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, constructors, inventors, theorists, architects—keep their emotions under control and preserve the coolness of their heads even though imagination will often inspire them. But it is not generally agreed that poets,