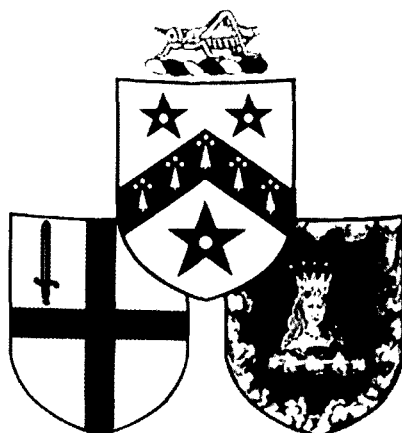


# *G R E S H A M* *C O L L E G E*



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## **MUSIC**

Lecture 1

### **MUSIC OF THE LAST CENTURY: DID SCHOENBERG GET IT WRONG?**

by

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## Music of the Last Century: Did Schoenberg Get It Wrong?

A question to begin:

What will happen to Schoenberg in the year 2000?

This question was posed by the great thinker and pianist Glenn Gould who, when making a documentary about Schoenberg for CBC Radio in 1963, put this question to various friends and enemies of the great figure. Now that we stand at that millennial point, it may be time for an answer; but I feel the only honest response to Gould's question is the Chinese Communist leader's answer to a question about the effects of the French Revolution - that 'it's still too early to say'. For the reception of Schoenberg's music is still as problematic now as at the time of Gould's question and his enlightened essay, 'Arnold Schoenberg - A Perspective'.

Now my current series of lectures is concerned more generally with the troubled relationship between composer and audience over the last 100 years - the loss of 'ownership' that seems to have befallen 'art music' during the lifetime of my grandparents. So it seems useful to begin by looking at a figure who may be central to this state of affairs. My aim today is to examine Schoenberg's artistic beliefs, and the orthodoxies of modernism that evolved from them; later I will give offer some thoughts on his musical language and its subsequent reception. This situation and its attitudes are now part of history; yet they are still very much with us in the perception and reception of new music today.

Gould himself noted the popular perception that Schoenberg played a big role in the alienation of the modern audience:

"..There can be no doubt that the fundamental effect (of Schoenberg's sound-world) has been to separate audience and composer. One doesn't like to admit this, but it is true. Many people around believe that Schoenberg has been responsible for shattering irreparably the compact between audience and composer, separating their common bond of reference and creating between them a profound antagonism. Such people claim that the language has not become a valid one for the reason that it has no system of emotional reference... accepted today." (1)

Gould's summary is to say the least unscientific as audience sociology: modern listener hostility has to be balanced against the much smaller social cross-section to endorse, say, a composer of the 1780s. Yet few would deny that a contract between art music's provider and consumer

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1 Gould, Glenn 'Arnold Schoenberg - A Perspective', in ed Page *The Glenn Gould Reader*, Faber 1984, pp.119-120 (hereafter Gould 1984)

has broken down, and everyone's still looking at Schoenberg. With his characteristic candour, Gould neatly isolates the problem of reception: "Such people claim that the (musical) language has not become a valid one for the reason that it has no system of emotional reference (that is) generally accepted". (1)

In other words, we respond by reference to what we already know; the concert-hall listener has no syntax, no nurtured responses to be called upon by music of the Schoenberg legacy. Note that Gould cites the role of Schoenberg's sounds, rather than his ideas, in his quotation. We shall hear that this lack of a reference system, far from being denied or treated as a problem, would later be hailed as an essential ingredient of Schoenberg's legacy to 'the new music'.

Of course it is debatable whom the 'legacy' might include: Gould adds Roger Sessions' remark that "all of us, no matter in what way we compose, compose differently because of Schoenberg"(2), and that must include some composers who do plug into a traditional system of emotional responses; Copland is an interesting example.

Considerations of emotional response at least address Schoenberg the composer: for no composer in history was more widely misrepresented in his lifetime - that is, as theoretical boffin and magician rather than, as he would have preferred, as creator of beauty. Gould reports that Schoenberg opened one of his last lectures, in Los Angeles, with the statement "I wonder sometimes who I am", before reminding his audience that adverts for the talk had denoted him "theoretician and controversial musical figure.." (3) Around the same time, in *My Evolution*, Schoenberg had underlined the predominance of practice over theorizing in his work:

"I am still more a composer than a theorist. I try to forget all theories and I continue composing only after having freed my mind of them. It seems to me urgent to warn my friends against orthodoxy." (4)

How rarely do we hear that quotation! Schoenberg's pronouncements have been very selectively remembered by posterity. Like many others, though, this one offers profound guidance to later composers; however, there is an irony here. For one legacy of Schoenberg's method, perhaps an unintended one, was a new reverence for constructional device as a kind of 'orthodoxy' - quite the opposite of 'forget all theories' - that is at variance with Schoenberg's balanced outlook. So it is important that the master is here putting it firmly back on the shelf of his workshop.

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2 *ibid.* p.119

3 *ibid.* p.109

4 Schoenberg, A 'My Evolution', in ed Stein E *Arnold Schoenberg: Style and Idea*, Faber 1975, pp.79-92 (hereafter 'My Evolution')

I recall when I was a student that this or that leading composer would be asked in seminars “how do you arrive at your pitches?” - a revealing question not just because one would not have needed to ask Brahms such a thing, but because of its assumption that ‘something was going on’ outside the listener’s direct aural grasp - and because in a way the question downgrades the pitch content, suggesting that the actual tones are not the foreground so much as a detail - ‘we hear the piece, but how do you arrive at the notes?’ as it were. Answers such as ‘I liked the sound’ would not have impressed, at least till Lutoslawski talked, in a set of interviews in the 1970s, of writing the music he would like to hear. That this belief in a *gestalt*, that something structural should be ‘going on’, is directly traceable to Schoenberg is confirmed via a favourite anecdote of mine told by jazz composer Dave Brubeck, who takes it up here.

[EXAMPLE]

That story underlines a conviction we will examine shortly, that tradition is the springboard for all originality - but chiefly it marks Schoenberg’s belief that ‘something should be going on’ beyond mere creative inclination, the stance that no doubt encouraged the view of him as theorist - and encouraged Mr Brubeck to find another mentor.

Nonetheless Schoenberg had since *much* earlier in his career been firing salvos against the notion of theory as art, such as in the opening chapter of his treatise on harmony, the monumental *Harmonielehre*: here he uses the telling comparison of the carpenter, who is ‘master’ not because of his theory but solely through his practical application of it. He goes on:

“the evolution of no other art is so greatly encumbered by its teachers as is that of music. For no one guards his property more jealously than the one who knows that, strictly speaking, it does not belong to him.” (5)

How galling for the composer who had issued thunderbolts like that in 1911 if, in 1950, he was still being introduced as ‘music theorist’. That first chapter of *Harmonielehre* proceeds to a wholesale rejection of the theoretical notion of ‘immutable laws of music’ that do not evolve - the notion of a fixed tonal system, for example. Asserting that so-called laws of art are little more than exercises in what he calls ‘good comparison’, Schoenberg says

“...Aesthetics does not prescribe laws of Beauty, but merely attempts to infer their existence from the effects of art.” (6)

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5 Schoenberg, A *Harmonielehre*, Faber 1978 p.7 (hereafter *Harmonielehre*)

6 *Harmonielehre* p.9

So rather, theory follows practice. On the same page he expostulates

“To hell with all these theories, if they always serve only to block the evolution of art...”! (6)

Now Schoenberg's rejection of theoretical bounds is especially interesting in being a fundamental precondition of his musical progress toward atonality and beyond - it is the historicist view of musical evolution, the conviction that the doors of invention are open, as it were, and true artists are obliged to step through them. They should build on the achievement of the past, rather than treating it as a limited store of 'legitimate' musical material within which to remain.

Schoenberg gives a concrete illustration, again in *Harmonielehre*, Chapter III, when discussing the overtone series (7). Not surprisingly, this natural phenomenon was and is still cited as an 'immutable' law of music, and specifically as proof of the primacy of a tonal system of key - for the series rises from its fundamental with the related notes we would call the triad, or arpeggio. Schoenberg's absolute rejection of this as any kind of innate law is important in several ways. What he says is as follows: (8)

“ the more immediate [lower, consonant] overtones contribute more, the more remote [dissonant] less. Hence the distinction between them is a matter of degree, not of kind. They are no more opposites than two and ten are opposites... and the expressions 'consonance' and 'dissonance', which signify an antithesis, are false. It all simply depends on the the growing ability of the analyzing ear to familiarize itself with the remoter overtones... expanding the conception of what is euphonious, suitable for art.. What today is remote can tomorrow be close at hand...and the evolution of music has followed this course.”

Schoenberg's historicist outlook is perfectly expressed by his remarks about the overtone series. He dismisses the usual division of 'consonant' and 'dissonant' overtones as artificial; he prefers to this a continuum in which the higher/dissonant notes of the series are merely more remote, and require more education if we are to hear them or, by extension, if we are to embrace their dissonance as part of a harmonic system. These more dissonant relationships in harmony are, as he saw it, merely an extension of the more consonant ones - not out of bounds so much of out of earshot.

It need hardly be stated that this belief in the possibility and necessity of going beyond tonal properties was central to European modernism; but it is worth offering a quotation from the next generation to

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7 Without long explanations, the overtone series is the physical constituent of any sounded note - it's a family of normally inaudible higher frequencies that contributes to the sound quality of that note - the stronger lower ones being more consonant, and vice-versa.

8 *Harmonielehre* p.20-21

underline their absolute insistence on the rightness of this - from Theodor Adorno, in his 'Music and New Music' from the early 1960's. Schoenberg had no greater champion than Adorno, and he would have been proud of this passage, from 10 years after the composer's death:

"The very notion that tonality itself is natural is itself an illusion. Tonality did not exist from the outset. It established itself in the course of a laborious process which lasted far longer than the few centuries in which major and minor have prevailed...Tonality is probably as ephemeral as the order of reality to which it belongs."(9)

Now, however much ink has been spilled subsequently on questions such as this, no composer working before or after Schoenberg (except maybe Berlioz or Boulez) has set down a personal position in contemporary debates as thoroughly as did Schoenberg himself. A brief survey of such arguments will help to depict the issues, and Schoenberg's own contribution to them.

A highly characteristic stance, which we have already met via Dave Brubeck, is set out in 'How One Becomes Lonely', from 1937 - it is that Schoenberg's innovation was only made possible because it was founded on a mastery of traditional technique. Elsewhere, he ends a concise list of his musical influences in 'A National Music', in 1931, with these words:

"...this 'something new' is linked to the loftiest models that have been granted to us. I venture to credit myself with having written truly new music which, being based on tradition, is destined to become tradition." (10)

This concept, of tradition as the one sure foundation of true innovation, was to become a core belief of the modernist mainstream: later Boulez would cite approvingly Adorno's own claim that there is more tradition in Webern's *Bagatelles* than in Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* - a remark which, once its claws are removed, still shines a hard beam on the work both of Webern and of many neo-classicists.

Schoenberg was by no means alone in making this continuity argument: by 1930 his loyal pupils, Berg and then Webern, were making the point for him in radio talks and public lectures. Willi Reich cites an interview from 1930 in which Berg stressed the continuity between the asymmetrical melodic melodies in his and Schoenberg's music and that of earlier masters.

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9 Adorno, Theodor 'Music And New Music', in *Quasi Una Fantasia*, Suhrkamp Verlag 1963, pp.249-268 (hereafter Adorno 1963)

10 Schoenberg, A 'National Music (2)', in ed Stein E *Arnold Schoenberg: Style and Idea*, Faber 1975, pp.172-174

"In this respect, a straight line leads from Mozart, through Schubert and Brahms, to Reger and Schoenberg..." (11)

This lineage is perhaps clearer as explained by Berg than it is from the actual examples; this itself opens up an issue of reception that we must keep in mind later, that logic is not everything in art. Schoenberg and his pupils often cite the most persuasive arguments on paper, which many of us nonetheless find hard to put into effect through the ear. So here are asymmetrical melodies by Mozart, Brahms and Schoenberg, who, incidentally, often cites Mozart and Brahms in this regard; the Schoenberg example is one he actually used himself.

[EXAMPLES:

*Mozart: K.421 (ii) - Brahms op. 18 (i)- Schoenberg Pierrot: Serenade]*

The problem is that the Mozart and Brahms are odd within an 'even' framework, specifically a harmonic framework not initially apparent around Schoenberg's line; so his purely *melodic* asymmetries are only part of the story. What is the *symmetry* against which we hear them?

It is fair to note that Berg addresses that point about the ear being the arbiter: for it happens that he gives important confirmation of something often questioned by enemies of the avant-garde, the 'new music' - that these composers heard and desired everything they wrote, even if it interlocked with the sort of structural logic encountered by Dave Brubeck.

"there is in this music - our music - not one bar, be it never so complex harmonically, rhythmically and contrapuntally, but has been subjected to the most severe aural checking, both by the inner ear and by actual listening. There is not one bar for whose sense.. we do not hold ourselves as responsible, artistically..."(11)

It is a great joy to me personally to find this proclamation, when my own teaching life is so much occupied with urging students to take responsibility for every musical result in their work.

Webern also took up the cudgels on the theme of Schoenberg's building upon tradition, in his important series of talks in 1935, noted down and later published as '*The Path to the New Music*' - in which he compared melodies from Beethoven and from *Verklärte Nacht*, to show the latter's essentially classical melodic build.

Elsewhere in his writings, Schoenberg delivers another central truth of creativity, that specific stylistic or technical features are, in

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11 in Reich, W *Schoenberg: A Critical Commentary*, Longman 1971 p.32-3



themselves, only a means; it is not this means, but the artistic end product it creates, that must be judged:

"Atonality or dissonance are no yardsticks for evaluation. True love and understanding of music will wonder: What has been said? How was it expressed? Was there a new message delivered in music? Has a new personality been discovered? Was the technical presentation adequate?" (12)

I suggest that these words should be visible on the desk of every one of us who adjudicates the work of young composers, but yet more so on the seat-backs of audiences hearing every new work in the concert hall.

Perhaps the most commonly stated truth in Schoenberg's writings on his own music lies in the numerous expositions of the theory of his own personal 'continuity'. This argument repeatedly asserts that a proper understanding of his early works is an essential and reliable gateway to the later (atonal and serial) music. Here he is in 'A Self-Analysis':

"I am sure that the works of my last style would find at least the respect they deserve if the audience were given a chance to do justice to the works of my earlier periods." (read 13)

One of the most direct expositions of the continuity idea - one could almost call it a strategy, so artfully does Schoenberg set it out, so ardently does he want us to come on board - is a passage from 'How One Becomes Lonely' where he sets out a comparison between *Verklärte Nacht* (1899) and the *4th String Quartet* (1936). His musical excerpts are cleverly selected as being rhetorically similar in actual materials - soaring violin over nervous tremoli and frenetic pizzicati - though of different harmonic colours (14). Let us hear them:

[EXAMPLES:

*Verklärte Nacht* (1899)/ *4th String Quartet* (1936)]

The point is cleverly made, but the fact that Schoenberg has to make it, and so frequently, of itself indicates a real shift in musical development that I cannot find addressed by the composer. For if, for comparison, we look at the stylistic evolution of earlier composers as diverse as Bach and Schubert, we see at once that no great leap of faith is required to reach their later work, though (to the ears of experts) they have 'earlier' and 'later' manners; however complex, the latter merely represents a deepening of what is already there, as expressive weight accrues. No special training is required to listen to their late

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12 Schoenberg, A 'A Self-Analysis', in ed Stein E *Arnold Schoenberg: Style and Idea*, Faber 1975, pp.76-79

13 *ibid.*, p.77. Crucially, he goes on to say "I personally do not find that atonality and dissonance are the outstanding features of my works." We shall return to this statement, so as to agree with it, later on.

14 Schoenberg, A 'How One Becomes Lonely', in ed Stein E *Arnold Schoenberg: Style and Idea*, Faber 1975, pp.33-36

music without a clear acquaintance with the early style. My transcript contains further thoughts on this topic. (15)

We should, I think, worry if the logic of the continuity argument, made so persuasively by Schoenberg so often, has not worked; it is hard to find committed listeners weaned on the ravishing earlier works who hurry home after hearing Verklärte Nacht to renew their assault on the Variations for Orchestra. Maybe it is fair to claim, as apologists for Marxism used to in the 1970s, that it has never been properly tried: but frankly it seems only realistic in 2000 to be open to the possibility that these are two different repertoires, that may never represent for the many the continuous canon in which Schoenberg believed so passionately. He is attempting to lead us through a gate he has found in the wall, and he recognizes that, while the path is obvious to *him*, his contemporaries are apprehensive about leaving the familiar garden, trampled though it has become. Maybe we remain apprehensive, here in 2000.

Two questions arise here that should be kept separate: the growing isolation of 'the new music', and resistance to Schoenberg's music in particular. The former question is of course an intractable one, but I should like to attempt a sketch of that situation - the alienation which, according to Glenn Gould, 'many people believe' - before turning to Schoenberg's music itself.

The loss of a mass audience for the European avant-garde is not merely the rejection of certain musical materials; if it were, this strangeness would no doubt have been overcome by now. The debate, such as it was - frankly there has been little constructive engagement - quickly centred

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15 You may notice that I have not given Beethoven as an example, for he is an influential exception who no doubt gave courage to Schoenberg. The later works of Beethoven have, undeniably, gained a forbidding aura of complexity since his death, and no doubt raised a few eyebrows in their own day too. From Beethoven was thus created the template of the artistic hero who, misunderstood but courageous, sternly forsakes the warmth of familiar expressive surroundings to follow his destiny. This is an essentially Romantic outsider-figure - the hero of Schubert's Winterreise follows such a path literally, though for love rather than art - yet for me Beethoven is in fact a rare example of it in music before Schoenberg and two of his great contemporaries - Skryabin and, in a way, Stravinsky. Richard Middleton sees the role of Beethoven in this process as pivotal, in his chapter on Adorno in *Studying Popular Music* (Middleton, R *Studying Popular Music*, chapter 2: 'It's all over now', p.36, OUPress 1990

"In a sense, the struggle is between developing compositional technique.. and prevailing relations of musical production. Beethoven is the historical fulcrum: in his work the two aspects are perfectly balanced... After Beethoven, the two split apart. Compositional autonomy is closed off in the sphere of avant-garde negation..."

upon the very essence of music, and of creativity. The high priest and scribe of modernism, Theodor Adorno, asserted with an energy almost tantamount to truculence that, as he put it in 'Music and New Music' (16),

"Rather... the new music constitutes a critique of the old one. Its enemies are well aware of this, and this why they raise such a hullabaloo about the undermining of tradition. Hence anyone who identifies with the new music should stand by this critical element instead of striving for acceptance."

He continues:

"Schoenberg... detested such famous melodies as the stretta in *Trovatore*, because you know the main rhythmic motifs after the first four bars, and because it is an insult to the musical intelligence to repeat them so complacently."

Adorno develops from this nothing less than a critique of the 'affirmative aspect' in existing Western music, its need to consolidate by what he calls "the law of affirmation" - basically the security of repetition.

Again and again composers of the stature of Schubert, Chopin, Debussy and Strauss were seduced into sacrificing integrity of structure to the need to conciliate. The repugnance aroused by these insinuating, ingratiating gestures, which have wormed their way into even the greatest works, forms part of... a qualitatively new music".(16)

In this radical view, the greatest art of the past is in constant danger of being strangled by convention, and the new art is overturning that: all those great composers were hampered by being just too *kind* to the listener, pampering us with those indulgent cadences and repetitions instead of making the listener *work*. This idea is a strident offspring of Schoenberg's own distinction, between 'developing variation' - the Brahms tradition of invention based upon material that has gone before - and what he regrets, the 'easy' sequential repetition of Wagnerian leitmotif - which is akin to Adorno's excessive 'affirmation', making concessions through reassurance.

Now if the strident tone of Adorno's analysis seems unlikely to have built bridges with the struggling listener, he makes it clear that this is unimportant - this task is far too serious for artists to start trying to be loved - what he called "the need to conciliate". Remember the exhortation "stand by this critical element instead of striving for acceptance." Schoenberg had long ago warned that the true artist would not stoop to court the admiration

of the individual listener. Adorno cites with approval the story of a Hollywood producer praising Schoenberg's 'lovely music', to which Schoenberg snarled 'my music is not lovely' (17).

Elsewhere, Adorno unveils a key constituent of the new aesthetic: in Schoenberg and Progress, he claims that those cultural conventions of previous art - the ones ensnaring even the greatest Romantic works - meant that the artist at any juncture could make infinite choices, because within such stylistic bounds this would make no difference. In effect, you can choose anything new, because nothing you can choose is new. Specifically, for example

"Most compositions by Mozart would offer the composer far-reaching alternatives without sacrificing anything."

By contrast, if you remove that framework of stylistic convention, then

"Schoenberg's compositions are the first in which nothing can actually be different: they are case studies and construction in one. There is in them no trace of convention such as guarantees any freedom of play." (18)

This missing convention is, of course, Glenn Gould's "system of emotional reference (that is) generally accepted" (1). Adorno recognizes this, but I think sees the avant-garde as the only force resisting domination by a conspiracy of commercialism that maintains bourgeois artistic conventions. We may feel how right he was, as more and more recordings of atrophied repertoire pour from the big record companies, themselves apparently paralysed by two irreconcilable ends.

In any case, the concept of a new music referential only to itself raises huge questions, about its mechanism for expression, and that of the earlier music that *is* 'bound by convention'. For Adorno the major distinction here is between the 'representation of emotion' and emotion itself. Just as the earlier art was subject to surrounding musical conventions, so these conventions were, he says, part of a code using emotional set-pieces - pictures of emotion, as it were, whose expression is thus found to be at a remove from the real thing.

"Dramatic music... from Monteverdi to Verdi presented expression as stylised communication - as the representation of passions... The process is totally different in the case of Schoenberg. Passions are no longer simulated, but rather: genuine emotions of the unconscious - of shock,

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17 *ibid.* p.256

18 Adorno, T 'Schoenberg and Progress', in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Sheed 1973, p.40 (hereafter Adorno 1973)

of trauma - are registered without disguise through the medium of music." (19)

This is a revelation for which society may not, even yet, be ready, however intriguing a music of raw emotion, that is self-referential, may sound. Yet Adorno is surely right in making some distinction here: some music of towering expressive power still accepts a stylised framework - the variation finales of Mozart concerti, for example - while other has inclined more to fantasy. We must wonder whether musical reception ultimately requires some such framework around its high art (such as it maintains around art for commercial consumption); only when we know that will we know for sure the fate of Schoenberg and his legacy.

With this point, I think, Adorno brings us to the heart of why audiences have struggled with the 20th-century avant-garde. His answer to Glenn Gould's point is thus that systems of reference for the listener are now corrupting bourgeois frameworks, and we are doomed unless we can overthrow them! But this ground, too, already bears Schoenberg's footprints - from his 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Music' in 1946. With clear vision he points out that

"While JS Bach was allowed to write music of a kind which in its real values only the expert can understand, very soon the composers in the 18th and 19th centuries came to feel that their real independence had gone...I would not contend that later composers consciously gave into these popular demands for comprehensibility... But there is no doubt that much in Schubert's melodic construction ... accommodated, probably instinctively, to the popular feeling." (20)

Schoenberg goes on that Wagner's expanding musical expression necessitated a new sort of concession, the disguising of a theme in different harmonic contexts - the leitmotiv - which, as we heard, he sees as inferior to Brahms's tradition of 'developing variation'. This passage also underlines Schoenberg's much deeper affinity to Brahms than the Wagner from whom he is commonly said to have been spawned. Of course, 'developing variation' is, in microcosm, Schoenberg's whole view of musical evolution - that the composer should build upon the tradition already laid down, not just repeat it. With great humanity he extols in music the 'consequences derived from the basic idea and remaining within the boundaries of human thinking and its demands of logic'. (20)

It may seem quite a leap from that talk of 'boundaries of human thinking' to Adorno's claim that Schoenberg's work is free of all conventional expressive context!

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19 Adorno 1973 (p.38)

20 Schoenberg, A 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Music', in ed Stein E *Arnold Schoenberg: Style and Idea*, Faber 1975, pp.124-136) (hereafter 'Criteria for the Evaluation')

Here we may briefly digress, for I believe earlier ages would happily have agreed with Adorno that their art offered representations of emotions rather than the thing itself - after all, the 18th-century doctrine of the *Affekts* positively enshrined this. Only with Romanticism did the artist feel it his task to take on the matter of personal revelation. It is no coincidence that the composers Adorno cited earlier as torn between revelatory greatness and conventional affirmation were all from the 19th Century - in fact the ability of Sonata form to reinvent itself throughout this period is, for me at least, a cause for amazement.

A work like Chopin's *Piano Sonata in Bb minor* exemplifies this, as the masterly outcome of an explosive marriage, between emotional revelation (21) and preexistent formal outlines that Chopin adopted less than most instrumental contemporaries. We can hear the Sonata-form machinery 'delivering' the music, as climactic affirmation gives way to developmental exploration, amid the emotional storm at the end of the 1st movement's Exposition section.

I offer all these ideas to build up a picture of the radical, 'other' view of music's proper identity that developed in mid-20th century Europe, and conditioned works still with us, like Boulez' *Le Marteau sans Maître* and *Gruppen* by Stockhausen.

[EXAMPLE:

Boulez - from *Structures 1a*]

Schoenberg and his pupils had already taken a hard line, doubtless shaping the outlook of fellow-pupil Adorno - and the overall picture of the radical tendency will be served by brief illustration of this.

In 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Music' we find Schoenberg striking this stabbing blow at art that does not take the rocky path:

"Thus artists who want to 'go back to a period', who try to obey the laws of an obsolete aesthetic or 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." (22)

This polemic tinge, doubtless intended here as no more than an uncomfortable truth, will in other writers take on an intolerant tone. Webern points out in *The Path To The New Music* that 25 years have elapsed since 1908, when Schoenberg went beyond tonal bounds. As a result, Webern says, there is really no value left in doing anything else - once the boundary was crossed, anything still working within it over

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21 I would suggest, with reference to Adorno's distinction, that the emotion here is couched in anything but stylised terms.

22 'Criteria for the Evaluation' p. 134

those 25 years is mere recycling, and hence valueless - presumably not only Rachmaninov, Puccini, Janacek but even, to be strictly logical, Strauss, Zemlinsky, Schreker - the old comrades.(23)

In Adorno's writings Schoenberg and Webern's dismissal of music still inhabiting boundaries of 'bourgeois conventions' has gone from telling of unpalatable truth to strident ideology; special hostility is reserved for the surprisingly durable career of what we may call 'neo-classical' trends.

In *Philosophy of Modern Music* Adorno writes highly immoderately that

"these impotent late heirs to a traditional hostility towards true originality resemble one another everywhere in their feeble mixture of compositional facility and helplessness. Shostakovich... the facile pupils of Stravinsky...the triumphant meagreness of Benjamin Britten - all these have in common a taste for tastlessness, a simplicity resulting from ignorance, an immaturity which masks as enlightenment and a dearth of technical means" - that last being something not usually levelled at Britten. (24)

Thus the uncomfortable telling of truths, as held by the '2nd Viennese' composers, has soured into the intemperate dismissal of music which, so far, has shown a marked ability to reinvent its expression for successive listeners - more so, incidentally, than some of 'the new music'. Britten and Shostakovich are still with us; some influential views are beginning to ask for how long Webern will be. It is interesting to note here that Schoenberg himself ended 'Criteria' with a contrastingly tolerant, inclusive remark about these colleagues:

"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...[he then cites some foolish earlier rejections of his]. 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'. (25)

To take stock of this outlook, then: the 'new music' was attempting a redefinition of music, something that even amounted, in Adorno's view, to a 'critique' of the previous music. Most surprising in this ideology may be that the indifference to reception was a positive stance, rather than merely an outcome evolving from an experimental doctrine.

We should not overlook the novelty of the concept of innovation itself, as explicitly elevated, in contrast to the outlook of composers

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23 Webern, *A The Path To The New Music*, Universal Edition 1963

24 Adorno 1973, p. 7

25 'Criteria for the Evaluation' p.136

of previous eras working within the context of accepted assumptions. Not only was something *new* being attempted, but it was being *attempted*, rather than merely happening. The concept of 'striking out' receives new credibility and weight, and is being more consciously articulated than ever. One gets that strong sense from Boulez when he describes discovering Messiaen's technical extensions of Webern in the late 40s; he says in essence 'here at last was the gateway to new worlds, what we had been seeking'.

Then there is the notion that expression divested of stylised emotional kit is immanent in the music - and Adorno's related idea that each work, freed from that burden of conventional costume, has a new uniqueness and could only be expressed in one form. This phenomenon in particular may have contributed to problems of audience reception faced by the new music.

Not the least damaging in terms of the reception by a wider public, next, is the tendency to pronouncements of strident intolerance against the worth of works in other traditions - something which, in public at least, has given way in recent times by a tendency to cautious niceness among today's figures.

A final aspect is the elevation of constructional activity, in the wake of the explicit mechanics of Schoenberg's 12-tone method. This, however, must be fairly laid at the door of the later generation rather than that of the Viennese 'three' - all three of whom explicitly warned against regarding their technical processes as 'the work' - as we heard earlier. But a markedly different view developed later, for in the early 1950s Boulez would write to John Cage in incredible theoretical detail about the technical goings-on at various levels of his *Polyphonie X*, a work he later agreed was 'a document' - almost a technical manual - more than a work. In 'Letter from Europe' in 1963, no less a voice than leading American modernist composer Elliott Carter observed bluntly that "There seems to be very little concern with the perception of these sounds... and therefore their possibilities for communication on the highest level." (26) The view that subsequent modern music must be similarly motivated, as a set of arcane procedures rather than an act of communication, is proving to be unfairly durable. To be aware just how radical it was, perhaps we should recall Mozart's hope that a work of the 1780s would 'appeal to amateur and connoisseur alike' - a characteristically humanist view of the levels at which art can operate.

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26 'Letter from Europe' in ed Bernard *Collected Essays and Lectures 1937-1995*, University of Rochester Press 1997, p.32



There, then, we have some ideas developed from Schoenberg and his pupils that then contributed to the edifice of new music as something for initiates. The words of Stefan George set by Schoenberg in his *2nd Quartet* are often quoted as pointing to his situation - "I feel the airs of a new planet" - but the next lines might equally describe the condition of the audience: "Through the dark, those faces fade upon my sight which even now were turning to me kindly."

Schoenberg the composer was, of course, in the front line of audience reception problems, just as he led the charge in the battle of ideas. I will not here rehearse the well-known diatribes that greeted his works from *Verklärte Nacht* onwards (read 27); but he would, I think, be weary and despondent that only his late-Romantic output has, by 2000, become established repertoire.

I want finally to take a brief personal look at his music, in effect trying to answer the question his pupil Berg addressed in his article entitled 'Why is Schoenberg's music so difficult to understand?'. In particular, because I have a personal dislike of easy answers, I want to look beyond the assumption that reception problems centre upon the role of dissonance. I remember from 20 years ago a remark made to me by a much more sophisticated young composer about what he didn't like in Schoenberg - 'not the obvious thing, the thing most people don't like'. At once I knew what he meant, that it was nothing to do with atonality, to which he was attuned, but something to do with the later sound-world - a fusion of texture, scoring, rhythmic language and so on.

It is easily overlooked that the profound development of Schoenberg's harmony brought with it some surprising upheavals in other areas, areas every bit as tangible on the musical surface. For me the obstacles to the later music centre more upon an astringency of instrumentation and a tendency to neo-classical angularity of rhythm. This astringency is something more elusive than merely forsaking extravagant scoring or Romantic harmony: it is a worthiness, an admirable presentation of unvarnished material, that has for me an almost academic flavour where once there was a greater sense of fantasy. However, so far from being mere whimsy on my part, the later asceticism of Schoenberg was part of a conscious development: in a revealing flash of cold steel in the 1941 article 'Composition with 12 Tones (1)', Schoenberg warned:

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27 Anyone who wants to observe the critics falling over themselves to couch new forms of hate-mail can read this fascinating collection:

Slonimsky, N *Lexicon of Musical Invective*, University of Washington Press 1974

"The childish preference of the primitive ear for colours has kept a number of imperfect instruments in the orchestra, because of their individuality. More mature minds resist the temptation to become intoxicated by colours and prefer to be coldly convinced by the transparency of clear-cut ideas." (28)

There is surely more than a whiff of the prevailing neo-classicism in this ascetic statement, for Schoenberg was by no means immune to the spirit of that diverse movement of the 1920s and 1930s. This was to be the basis of a notorious article by the young Boulez, for whom Schoenberg was in some ways not radical enough: in *Schoenberg Est Mort* (29), he accused the earlier composer of couching his 'airs of a new planet' in the forms of an old one - the Gavottes and Giges of the Baroque dance suite that we find in the first 12-note works in the 1920's - and treating the row as a disguised 'theme' rather than a new structural paradigm.

We may wonder if Schoenberg was not over-compensating, as it were, for the obvious modernity of his reformed language, anxious to parade its traditional antecedents perhaps. We have heard ample evidence of his awareness of those roots. Other commentators picked up on the apparent contradiction between old, tonally-shaped forms and atonal harmonic content: Constant Lambert pointed out in *Music Ho!* that

"a dance tune cannot really be submitted to the same variety of treatment that can be imposed on an object by a painter. Picasso's cubist bottles of wine still remain bottles, but Schoenberg's atonal waltzes emphatically do not remain waltzes." (30)

Even Elliott Carter, himself at the heart of American modernism, observed in 1958 (31) that, after what he called "a glimpse of a new universe of emancipated discourse, unfortunately... Schoenberg quickly returned to the classical musical shapes upon adopting the 12-tone system".

This brings me to the rhythmic aspect of the stylistic change - my feeling that the impulsive pliability of earlier works gave way to a stiff relentlessness of phrase-structure especially. In this next example, from the scherzo of *String Quartet no 2*, music of fantastic fluidity precedes a sophisticated Waltz parody; this contrasts with the heavy-footed, highly symmetrical syntax of the later finale from the *String Quartet no 3*.

[EXAMPLES:

*String Quartet no 2* (ii) 3'30"/ *String Quartet no 3* (iv)]

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28 Schoenberg, A 'Composition with 12 Tones (1)', in ed Stein E *Arnold Schoenberg: Style and Idea*, Faber 1975 p.235 (hereafter 'Composition with 12 Tones (1)')

29 Boulez, P 'Schoenberg Est Mort' in *Rélevés d'Apprenti*, Paris 1966

30 Lambert, C *Music Ho!*, New York 1966 p.174

31 'A Further Step' in *Carter: Collected Essays* p.6

Admittedly, all such examples must reflect personal responses; I remember as a student seeing a television programme in which Alexander Goehr spoke of loving Schoenberg's musical phases as one loves those of any composer of the past; so my difficulties will not be everybody's. Yet I do wonder if the properties cited have not accounted for reception difficulties more than the familiar question of dissonance.

Let me look briefly at a work that does offer me fantasy and richness from within Schoenberg's turbulent transitional phase. The *Fünf Orchesterstücke* from 1909 in their first version employed a vast orchestra, but later revisions and even a chamber version showed that they do not need it for their effect. My admiration points to my own 'primitive ear for colour', for alas! it is instrumental combinations that delight me in particular here. The most famous example is the 3rd piece, ironically known as 'Colours', which belies Schoenberg's later strictures about mere 'colour' by clothing similar harmonies in the most subtle shifts of orchestral garb. No less thrilling is No 2, whose sinuous refrain is somehow also sensuous in its counterpoints:

[EXAMPLE: from Five Orchestral Pieces no 2]

The explosive brevity of no 4 makes it the perfect example in music of the *Expressionism* movement of the time. Yet there is also shape, for a sort of recapitulation does reveal itself. Overall, though, this is surely Adorno's 'emotion itself rather than the representation of emotion'.

[EXAMPLE: from Five Orchestral Pieces no 4x]

And so to a loose thread that I discarded earlier, about the logical process behind the 2nd Viennese School's development. To read the persuasive arguments of all three composers, one is lulled with a feeling that no other course was possible - as, indeed, it was not, for them. Yet this leaves one teetering on the brink of one the great *non sequitur's* in musical history, that so inevitable and logical a step, a continuity of tradition undertaken by consummate musicians, can have been largely scorned by the listening public. It is indeed a useful reminder that the imperative in art is called not by the laws of logic but the twists and turns of humanity and, face it, of fashion. I would guess that even Szymanowski's two Quartets, never mind the now universally-performed Janacek, Shostakovich and Bartók canons, are programmed more often than Schoenberg's, especially his later ones. The six Bartók Quartets are especially useful as a comparison: while the extreme astringency of parts of these works matches anything in Schoenberg, its shocking expressive power arguably lies in the 'tonal' context of the dissonance, the presence of tones widely functioning as root pitches for Bartok. This alone bestows a sense of harmonic tension

that a music beyond tonality is 'logically' - if we are to be logical - unable to generate. In fact it is hard to find in the master's own writings anything about generating harmonic tension after what Schoenberg calls 'the emancipation of the dissonance' - only that "by avoiding the establishment of a key, modulation is excluded". (32)

In his companion article, *Composition with 12 Tones*(2), he adds: the method...reinstates the effects formerly furnished by the structural functions of harmony" (33), but the ensuing discussion seems to lack any treatment of the expressive force of dissonance in its tonal context.

It is time to wonder, at least, if Schoenberg's dream of acceptance for his direction will ever be realised, or if the whole thing, for all the logical explanations, is turning out to be an expensive aberration. Glenn Gould closes his 1964 essay optimistically, feeling that the split between audience and composer will surely be healed; wisely the great pianist does not answer his own question about Schoenberg in 2000 by suggesting an improvement will have taken root by that date. Instead Gould goes on, "composers are on the whole an incredibly persuasive lot, and one can be confident that... good relations between audience and composer can be restored".(34)

In some small ways, at least, they already have been, in 2000, not least by a new generation of tireless and selfless educators. Yet we have heard that the loss of a mass-audience for the art music of the last 100 years relates directly to an intentional revoking of the prior contract that, I believe, existed hitherto; rebuilding that sense of ownership will, I think, take more than a bit of good 'PR'. Elliott Carter could already see the pitfalls in 1958:

"the question to be asked at this point is whether the familiar, delayed public reception that has greeted so many contemporary works will be delayed forever if works in the new advanced style [of the European avant-garde] eliminate too many of the preestablished techniques... The effort of striking out along the new path...could result in complete hermeticism."(35)

So it is 2000, and is at least time to ask just *how* persuasive we as composers have managed to be.

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32 'Composition with 12 Tones (1)' p.217

33 Schoenberg, A 'Composition with 12 Tones (2)', in ed Stein E *Arnold Schoenberg: Style and Idea*, Faber 1975 p.245-250

34 Gould 1984 p.121

35 Carter: *Collected Essays* p.9