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This public lecture, delivered to a capacity audience in the University of Cincinnati’s Wilson Auditorium, by the world renowned Canadian pianist Glenn Gould, can hardly be expected, in its present form, to recreate the excitement of the event itself, since the genial magic of Gould’s lecture manner cannot be put on paper. Perhaps it can be suggested by saying that Gould the lecturer is an extension of Gould the interpreter, and those qualities of lucidity and warmth, style and wit, that shine through his performer’s art, animate his speaking as well and make his lecture style as formidable as his musical performance.

Gould appeared in a unique series, The Corbett Music Lectures, made possible through a fund established by businessman impresario, J. Ralph Corbett, and Mrs. Corbett, in behalf of the College-Conservatory of Music of the University of Cincinnati. These lectures provide the public with an opportunity to learn many unusual aspects of the musical world from some of the greatest composers, musicians, and musicologists of our time. This is the first of the Corbett lectures to be published.

Gould here enunciates a general thesis about Schoenberg that, so far as I am able to discover, is original and in its present form fruitful for further Schoenberg analysis.

There is not, to be sure, a shortage of Schoenberg analysis and the fact that one of the world’s greatest performing musicians who is also one of the most articulate, has addressed himself head on to modern music’s most persistent thorn, may also remind us that he is carrying out an honorable tradition. Beethoven grunted about earlier composers but he in turn inspired Berlioz to take music criticism very seriously. Schumann, who propagandized for Chopin, and for Brahms, devoted a great deal of time and energy to serious journalism. Debussy, Hugo Wolf, Wagner — these were among the luminaries of the past 100 years who combined the creation of music with commentary on the music of others. Liszt contributed a study of Chopin, otherwise pianists have not been unduly busy writing about music, and it may be assumed that the composer in Liszt rather than the pianist was writing the book (if indeed he wrote it — there is some obscurity here).
Arnold Schoenberg was until recently the most discussed, least performed composer in history. That situation has not altered drastically, but as the result of a few pioneer performers and conductors, and because of the phonograph with its limitless demand for repertory, there is no longer any excuse for remaining ignorant of Schoenberg’s music. It is all available, much of it in sufficient excellence of performance to warrant our saying that we know it. Anyone who has had the privilege of hearing Glenn Gould play Schoenberg will know that the performance problem is particularly disturbing when he has heard other musicians in the same repertory. For Schoenberg does not lend himself to any automatic instrumental or vocal technique. He must be thought out anew; the performer who masters him will have been born a second time if he truly overcomes the problems of interpretation posed uniquely by serial technique.

It is part of the purpose of Gould the pianist to make Schoenberg a listenable experience, as it is equally his intention in lecturing us that we comprehend some of Schoenberg’s intellectual difficulties — the thorny part of him.

Arnold Schoenberg came out of Vienna, the city that gave Freudian psychoanalysis to the world, and the new school of Viennese empirical philosophy in the principal person of Wittgenstein. These were all drastic, even revolutionary developments, attesting to no unity among them — indeed, there is almost nothing save accident of birthplace that they hold in common, though it might be argued that the pre-determined hypothesis of Freud, based upon previous observation and an instinctive sense of scientific procedure, has something in common with Schoenberg, if little or nothing with Wittgenstein. It might be further argued that Freud’s research into and analysis of the subconscious, places us in a new dimension of psychoanalytical expression, just as Schoenberg’s musical “research” offers us a new spectrum of musical expression. A theory of convergence might not be inappropriate, though it would not, in any sense, be binding.

However, Gould has broken another ground, the bold historical judgment that Schoenberg represents simplicity, despite the common, labored charge of undue, artificial complexity, hurled at his head by several decades of listeners of the radical center, where most concert listening is done. Gould’s analysis, comparing him to Monteverdi, rescues Schoenberg from the charge that he was a radical leftist, and places him in the mainstream as a great historic synthesizer and simplifier — indeed, a true conservative.

Musical politics do indeed make strange bedfellows, and the coupling of Schoenberg with Monteverdi will be hooted down in some quarters, considered foolish in others, and explored for the suggestiveness, the audacity and imaginative ness that it possesses, by still others. There is the obvious, indeed necessary implication that the chromatic scale needed to be systemized once it came into general use in the post-modal early Baroque period. Gould’s hypothesis is unassailable on this count at least. There is the further analogy that both composers appeared at a watershed of history, when one immense accumulation of style and method yielded to another, and was in part responsible for it, like Janus looking both ways.

In Renaissance music, as Bukofzer says in his powerful study, “Music in the Baroque Era,” polyphony was distinguished by the accidental character of dissonance — the passing tones were the carriers of dissonance, and polyphony was the fundamental concept. In the Baroque era, the chord had become the fixed entity, and polyphony was now subject to the laws of the chord. In one sense, therefore, Schoenberg is pre-Monteverdi, in that chords in serial music are “by-products of the part writing.” Bukofzer uses the Janus symbol to refer to Monteverdi: “Monteverdi thus appears as a Janus-faced composer between two eras,
conservative with regard to the preservation of polyphony in principle but revolutionary with regard to its transformation in practice." This is Gould's thesis, if I read it correctly. The chaconne bass of Monteverdi, it might be argued, had a function not completely remote from the "tone row" of Schoenberg. These basses were "repeatedly repeated a great many times throughout the entire composition with little or no melodic variation." (Bukofzer, ibid., p. 42.)

Though Gould denies any connection between expressionism in painting and Schoenberg's music, we must remember that Schoenberg was himself a talented painter who had been praised by Kandinsky. Kandinsky wrote that Schoenberg's paintings were "expressionist," in that they "set down his subjective emotions alone in permanent form." (Wassily Kandinsky, "Die Bilder," cited by Dika Newlin in "Bruckner, Mahler, Schoenberg," p. 251.)

Schoenberg has already become an international force, in fact the only international force to succeed Romanticism. Expressionism followed quickly upon Impressionism, just as in painting, though musical Impressionism had much less revolutionary impact than the parallel (prior) development in painting, and it swept the boards. Serial technique is the first international vocabulary in music, since the Wagnerian-Brahmsian chromatic synthesis had broken down the so-called "common practice period" of harmonic technique. Impressionism was a stopgap movement that seemed a logical step forward and a saving grace against the excesses of the post-Wagnerian revolution, but it turned out to be not much more than compromise. In art, compromise does not do what it does in politics — make it possible to live another day. Compromise in art induces death, and when Impressionism made the rounds in France, Italy, Hungary, Russia, Germany and the U.S., saying what it had to say, which was a great deal but not enough to sustain a new style of true international force, it was clear that music faced a crisis for which Impressionism failed to provide the answer.

Schoenberg stepped into the ensuing vacuum, according to the Gould analysis, with the originality, the artistic authority, the world-outlook that had characterized previous great schools, with the capacity to create great works. What is now to be expected is that there will be a flourishing of serial technique in a larger body of important international works. Unfortunately, this simple cause and effect relationship, which was common enough in the past three centuries or more, is unlikely to ensue in the foreseeable future, because so much of the artistic talent may be presumed to have perished in the two great organized slaughters of World Wars I and II. For this melancholy reason, Gould's hypothesis is in no immediate danger of being fully tested, and it may be regarded as an exhortation to those young composers looking about for a direction, as well as a description of what the past can provide in the way of rational explanation. Stravinsky, after decades of denouncing serial technique, adopted it very late in life. Composers in the wake of Stravinsky have done likewise. Jazz composers have taken it up and the only holdouts seem to be the Beatles who, presumably, have not yet heard of the problem. Gould points out that popular art has recourse to serial music as background for television serials. Serials need serial music, a formula that has been adopted, one likes to believe, in the blissful ignorance suggested by the correspondence in terms. Serious composers also need it, as the present anarchy and whimsicality of method seem to indicate, and we may expect that the several decades of peaceful coexistence with serial technique will one day bear the fruit that international concert audiences, fed on a steady diet of a decreasing number of too-familiar works, need so desperately and in fact deserve for the patience they have displayed in the face of the ingenuity of excuses provided by directors who hate what is new.
It would be foolish, however, to suppose that hatred of what is new is what prevents the whistling of serial music by happy concertgoers, at 10:30 on Saturday night, after they have heard Glenn Gould play the solos of Bach's D Minor Concerto and the Schoenberg concerto. It is something both more impersonal and less. On the one hand, the sudden destruction of the diatonic scale and all its courtiers, after 300 years when composers could employ nothing else because they knew nothing else, constitutes shock treatment for audiences and musicians who resent the suggestion that they need it. On the other hand, concertgoers have been led to believe that their emotions correspond to the vocabulary of familiar music, and even if they have profoundly new experiences in life they are reluctant to accept the possibility of profoundly new experiences in aesthetics.

It may be that serial music needs an entirely new audience; that it does not even want the present concert audience, just as the "art movie" has its audience and the "popular movie" has a different one. This divergence, if it occurs, may follow something similar to what happened when "serious music" ceased to be the sole property of the church, at some point in the Renaissance. The multiplication of points of view in any field approaches infinity, when the field becomes better explored, so it seems, and when proof is lacking, as in any branch of aesthetics, it is ultimately what society will accept that becomes the "truth" of it. Serial music remains at the basis of more contemporary avant grade composition than any other idea, and for this reason alone any new light on Schoenberg is of the utmost importance since the avant grade includes the last quartets of Beethoven as well as "Moses and Aron." Hence the importance of what Gould has to say.

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ARNO L SCHOENBERG—A PERSPECTIVE

by Glenn Gould

In the half century of his incredible career, Schoenberg typified the dilemma of the contemporary musical situation in a very special way. Within the fifty years of his creative life he produced a remarkable series of works which, initially, accepted and fed upon the traditional musical premise of his time, then challenged it and came perilously close to anarchical reaction, and then, confronted by the terror of anarchy, became almost over-organized, over-legislated by super-imposed rules, and finally ended by attempting to co-ordinate the systems of legislation which he had developed with aspects of the tradition which he had, many years before, abandoned. And so, in this cycle of acceptance, rejection, and reconciliation, we have not only a spectacular chronological development, but we have also the basic pattern for much of what has taken place in the first half of the 20th century.

It will be necessary for me to speak of Schoenberg's chronology at some length, but it would be a mistake to infer that the chronological relation of events in his work is necessarily typical of every aspect of important contemporary music. It is not, and even if it were, it is very dangerous to put too much reliance upon the rather shaky theory of the relation between the evolution of style and the passing of a given number of years. Not all great art moves in what is analytically a direction of emancipation. On the contrary, it seems to me that even artists who are considered dangerously reactionary by their contemporaries can be credited with great works. One need only call to mind Richard Strauss who is, after all, one of the true giants of the 20th century and whose stylistic growth, far from being concerned with the race against the passing years which preoccupied Schoenberg, takes a direction which can only be described historically as retrograde.
If you are particularly fond of the last works of Strauss, as I am, it is essential to acquire a more flexible system of values than that which insists upon telling us that "novelty equals progress equals great art." I do not believe that because a man like Richard Strauss was hopelessly old-fashioned in the professional verdict, he was, therefore, necessarily a lesser figure than a man like Schoenberg who stood for most of his life in the forefront of the avant garde. If one adopts that system of values, it brings about the inevitable embarrassment of having to reject, among others, Johann Sebastian Bach as also being hopelessly old-fashioned.

In fact, I think there is a fairly good argument in favour of assuming that the technical competence, at least, of a composer like Strauss, who remains securely within the tradition that he knows, may well be more deft, more secure, more reliable than that of a man like Schoenberg who was so much involved with the pursuit of an evolutionary concept that he stood, at times, upon the brink of technical disaster. So, although I cannot imagine an approach to Schoenberg which does not attempt to examine the fascinating evidence of his chronology, I certainly do not believe that because he had a most remarkably inventive mind—he had, as you might say, more "patents pending" than anyone else in recent times—he should, therefore, automatically be considered the greatest or the most substantial musical figure. The historical fascination with Schoenberg's role is already evident. It will likely remain as long as music exists—so crucial is his position—but the greatness that may be attributed to him will have to stem from other criteria, other methods of judgment.

This is the distinction which is only too easy to make in Schoenberg's case—a distinction between his powers of invention (his forward looking qualities) and his powers of execution (his actual composing abilities). Only at a time of great transition and confusion, such as our century has witnessed, is a distinction like this liable to be made at all. Many people will accept the qualifications of Schoenberg as a vital historical force, but will emphatically reject the man's music itself. And it is certainly much easier to prove that Schoenberg was vital and indispensable to our time than to prove that he was profound and that he was great. The fact that people tend to make this distinction between the theories which Schoenberg tried to substantiate and his actual product as a composer haunted and tortured him throughout most of his life. He regarded himself simply as a composer, and he be-
lieved that whatever formulations he developed pertained only to his compositions.

Actually, there existed rather less of the dogmatist in Schoenberg's character than one might imagine. He was not by any means a relentless propagandist who attempted to coerce associates and admirers into accepting all the consequences of the technical manifestations of his work, but he did long for the day when they would believe in the work itself. In fact, shortly before his death in 1951, in a lecture in Los Angeles, he offered a very touching summary of this struggle of composer versus theoretician. He opened that lecture with an extraordinary sentence: "I wonder sometimes who I am." He went on to say that he had noticed some newspaper advertisements for his lecture in which he had been advertised as being a famous "theoretician and controversial musical figure known for the influence he had brought to bear on modern music." And then Schoenberg added, "Up to now, I thought I composed for different reasons."

It may be that Schoenberg was right in fearing that he would be remembered for the technical solutions which he had proposed to the contemporary musical dilemma, rather than for the masterpieces which he felt he had written. In fact, we already seem to be entering a period in which, although the name of Arnold Schoenberg is known very widely indeed — is in fact almost as frequent a drawing-room reference as Freud or as Kafka or, if you happen to be in a particularly "one-up" drawing room, as Kierkegaard — yet many people remark that apart from a few of his docile and romantic early works, his compositions have so far failed to attract any large share of public response.

What makes it so difficult to know about Schoenberg, to know clearly what the future will hold for him, is the fact that his creative activity has taken place during a moment of transition in the arts, a moment of transition at least as profound and perhaps as inevitable as that which occurred toward the end of the Renaissance. In those days, the fantastic complication of modal composition was being replaced by the relative simplicity of the system which we came to call tonality, the system from which all important Western music of the last three hundred years derives. And the great masters of that day, masters like Sweelinck in the Netherlands, Gibbons in England, Monteverdi in Italy, who also stood astride a profound historical transition, had the responsibility of clarifying into what might be called a public,
In the early years of the 17th century the flowing, lucid part-writing of the Renaissance began to take on an appearance of a sturdier, more rigidly controlled harmonic regime, began to be conceived largely in harmonic, that is to say in vertical terms, rather than in linear, horizontal terms as had been the case in the Renaissance, began to accept an intentionally more limited vocabulary in which the harmonic events would be connected to each other by an attraction which resembled the force of gravity, which provided a centrifugal urge for this music and which bound its harmony together into a preferential order. And so this new music of the 17th century seemed (or, at any rate, seems by comparison) music of great simplicity and forthrightness, of public as opposed to private character.

Well, Schoenberg appeared at a time when the process of this transition to tonality was being reversed, at a time when the incredibly rich, sensual harmony of the late 19th century was once again giving way to a linear, horizontal direction. He appeared at a time in which there was a need for more rigid control of the compositional elements — a time in which questions pertaining to the fundamental nature of the theoretical process had to be answered, just as they had been three hundred years before. And like the composers of the early 17th century, whose music was infinitely less complex than that of the masters of the late Renaissance, Schoenberg's music represents, in my opinion, an enormous simplification of the romantic Wagnerian tradition from which it derived.

Now I know this this seems a very odd statement because we are so accustomed to the idea that music which is rigidly legislated, as Schoenberg's music is popularly supposed to be, is complicated or in some way difficult to understand. But it seems to me that this is not at all the same thing as complication. I do not believe that a language like that of Schoenberg's, which tries so hard to be logical, to trumpet its logic with organic proof of a raison d'être, is a language which in the true sense of the word is complicated. In my view, the really complex language is the one in which not only are there certain rules and regulations, but in which there is also an element that is not quite susceptible to proof, not entirely demonstrable, but which to a degree is concealed and subliminal. In other words, I suggest to you that the most complicated endeavours in art are those in which
the process of rational decision is closely allied with the instinctive process.

In this sense, the language that Schoenberg inherited, the language of Wagner, Strauss, and Mahler is an immensely complicated language. It is a language in which one wonders what greater intensities could possibly be drawn from its vocabulary, in which one gasps as each work seeks to overwhelm with an emotional jolt greater than that which preceded. It is a language which was the culmination of three hundred years of musical technique — a constantly evolving technique to be sure but a technique which was based upon certain common experiences with this particular gravity of chords which is tonality — a language which as it grew older underwent many practices which clarified or crystallized its usage, but which primarily became more expressive, more aware of its potential, more complicated in the true sense of the word. And as it grew older and more familiar its practitioners discovered that all that was left to add to this language was the abortive gesture, the deliberate slackening of discipline, the willingness, in fact, to do for an expressive reason the wrong thing.

So, Schoenberg came upon the musical scene at a time when such fantastic complication existed (if you accept my definition of complexity) that his primary reaction was to provide a legislation which would attempt to organize, to rationalize, to intellectualize, to make outward what had, to a degree, been inward. If Schoenberg had done that and only that, one would certainly conclude that Schoenberg was not a very subtle artist, that he was a man determined to make understandable those things which are incapable of being completely understood, to legislate those things which cannot ever be governed.

But what must be remembered about Schoenberg and his historical position is that there was an organic disorder which undermined the health of tonality in his day. It was due, of course, to this fantastic complexity of the vocabulary which he inherited, due to the many ambiguous harmonic relationships which then existed, that that simplicity which was the founding purpose of tonality became distorted and unbalanced by the extension of the tonal vocabulary, that those liberties engendered by tonality in its last stages weakened, with their pursuit of an expressive purpose, the fundamental tenets of the tonal philosophy.
Now, I am going to consider Schoenberg chronologically for a few minutes and take a fairly close look at this fantastic transition which he so clearly embodies in his work. As a tonal composer, as a man working within a clearly defined key relation, Schoenberg contributed, in my opinion, some of the most glorious music of the early 20th century. His work within tonality in that period spans approximately twelve years, beginning with the first little songs which he composed as a student and counting up to the last of the works which are unmistakably tied together by an allegiance to one key center—the String Quartet No. 2, written in 1908. These works include the fairly popular string sextet, Verklaerte Nacht, one of the greatest symphonic poems ever written, Pelleas und Melisande, two symphonies for chamber orchestra,* and two string quartets, as well as the mammoth oratorio, Gurrelieder.

In several of the works of this period, particularly the symphonic poem Pelleas und Melisande, Schoenberg seems to fit without any discomfort into the idiomatic concepts of Richard Strauss. In fact, at the turn of the century, both Strauss and Mahler had a good deal of sympathy for the young Schoenberg, and both of them seemed to feel that he was one of the bright young men who was definitely going places. They just weren't sure what places! In works like Verklaerte Nacht or Pelleas und Melisande, we find Schoenberg accepting the premises of the late Romantic tonal language without much question and, except for an unusually lively and well integrated inner voice structure and at times a particularly wide-ranging bass line, there is nothing that more than hints at the way things were actually developing for Arnold Schoenberg.

In comparison with these earliest tonal works, the works written only a few years later already betray the intellectual power of Schoenberg weightily intruding upon the more instinctive process, and, in comparison with Verklaerte Nacht or with the early Lieder, the chamber symphonies, for instance, are works of incredible power and drive—works which are controlled by a wonderfully firm hand. Just as Verklaerte Nacht is rhapsodic and whimsical, languid and sequential, the chamber symphonies are tight and driven, functional and classical.

In many of these works, Schoenberg's use of dissonance becomes

*While the greater part of the second symphony was written during this period, the work was not complete until 1939.
surprisingly emancipated. The theory of dissonance within the system of tonality is that it must be derived from and resolve into, in fact be an embellishment of, a fundamental progression; but Schoenberg began to experiment with dissonance which was so protracted in duration that it became more and more difficult to relate it directly to a harmony of preparation and resolution. Mind you, in this music he still does relate chords such as this quartal chord from the beginning of the first chamber symphony.

\[\text{Ex. 1}\]

*Kammersymphonie, Opus 9*  
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Here we begin to notice that the interval components of the chord are being used to provide melodic or linear consequences as well as for purely vertical sensation, and, moreover, the nature of the quartal chord in this particular progression and of its eventual resolution into the chord of F major is such that, although it is provided with the eventual satisfactions of a resolution, the chord itself could resolve in several other directions with equally satisfactory results. And so, Schoenberg is here examining the consequences of relating dissonantly conceived chordal progressions to a basic triad harmony, not simply extracting closely related dissonances from triad harmonic formations. In terms of the evolution of his style and of our 20th-century musical language, this was an enormous step forward for Schoenberg.

This first period of his work ends with the composition of the String Quartet No. 2, Opus 10, (written in the year 1908) which introduces in its last movement a texture of such wildly leaping ninths and sevenths that it can no longer be said to partake seriously of any responsibility to a co-ordinated tonal centre. There is, however, significantly enough, attached to this last movement a vocal part for soprano solo with the rather significant text by the poet Stefan George: "I feel the breath of other planets blowing."
And so, we come to the second period in Schoenberg's life, the period in which he attempted to feel his way into this strange new world without benefit of a clearly defined harmonic system. It has often been pointed out by critics of this new music that the error of such a profound change is that it does not evolve as language does: slowly, functionally, within the common reference of the public. It is perfectly true that various devices of contemporary poetry suggest to some degree the calibration of serial technique, but, by and large, there has been no fundamental change in the nature of literary materials, and there certainly has been no sense of divorce between the writer and the reading public as there would seem to have been between the musician and his audience.

Of course, the early propagandists for atonality pointed with a good deal of pride to the fact that the movement toward abstract art began at almost exactly the same time as atonality, and there are certain comfortable parallels between the careers of the painter Kandinsky and the composer Schoenberg. But I think it is dangerous to pursue the parallel too closely for the simple reason that music is always abstract, that it has no allegorical connotations except in the highest metaphysical sense, and that it does not and has not, with very few exceptions, pretended to be other than a means of expressing the mysteries of communication in a form which is equally mysterious.

In other words, I believe that no matter how comforting the parallels which may be drawn between music and the other arts in recent times, the only parallels which really count are those which can be drawn with previous circumstances of musical history such as I have attempted to draw with the late years of the Renaissance. So, if my explanation of the relativity of atonality is correct, it must necessarily exclude many of the comments which have been made about atonality and its derivation, particularly those which point to the significance of its having first appeared in the turbulent years immediately preceding the First World War. I do not believe that the undeniable state of chaos in the world at that time had very much to do with the artistic function of atonality or with abstraction in art, for that matter, if only for the reason that not all human beings are equally moved or, at any rate, moved in the same direction by the events and tensions of their own time.
Nor should we over-dramatize, I think, the shattering blow that came at that time to the comfortable world of the Edwardians. The world knew what suffering could mean long before the days of Kaiser Wilhelm. And, again, the reaction to pain, to suffering, is such a personal thing — it does not necessarily entail the dissipation of order. It can be depicted by an attempt to invoke an artistic order to compensate distress. And so, it seems to me a great mistake to read into the fantastic transition of music in our time a total social significance. Undeniably, there do exist correlations between the development of a social stratum and the art which grows up around it, just as the public manner of early Baroque music related to some degree to the prosperity of a merchant class in the 16th century; but it is terribly dangerous to advance a complicated social argument for a change which is fundamentally a procedural one within an artistic discipline.

In the music that Schoenberg wrote following the Second String Quartet of 1908 and preceding the First World War, there are still, as one might expect, a good many vestiges of a key relation, but these vestiges now have the nostalgia that we associate with the reminiscence of a by-gone and much-loved period. Examine, for instance, this passage from the second of the Piano Pieces, Opus 11, in which you will detect a very distant reminiscence of the key of D minor.

![Ex. 2](image_url)

_Drei Klavierstücke, Opus 11, No. 2_  
_Copyright 1910 Universal Editions, Used by permission._
Here, on the other hand, is another brief excerpt which also coincidentally suggests D minor. It is from the Opus 15 "Book of the Hanging Gardens." Notice how much more subtle are the harmonic implications of this song.

Ex. 3

Das Buch der hangenden Garten. Opus 15, No. 10
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In other words, in this music there still exists to a degree an order of preference, a process of selection, determined by the faint reminiscence of tonal procedures. There does not, in the sense that we now use the word, exist atonality. But examine this brief example from Schoenberg's Opus 19, and in it you will not likely detect any real tonal centre.

Ex. 4
Sechs kleine Klavierstücke, Opus 19, No. 5
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Only about three or four years separate this little piano piece from the song excerpt in Example 3, but the latter constitutes almost half of an entire bagatelle — indeed all six of the Opus 19 to which it belongs require not more than five minutes for performance. Can you imagine the change which had occurred in the world of Arnold Schoenberg — a change that would make the man who wrote the Gurrelieder and Pelleas und Melisande ten years earlier confine himself now to the activity of writing tiny pieces for the piano? Not that there is anything wrong with writing tiny pieces for the piano, but these small pieces tell us more about the desperation of Schoenberg's position in 1911 or 1912 than any words could do. Here he was committing himself to a language which he did not know — a language
which he had no means to govern except through his innate musicality. What a temptation it must have been to return to the solid ground that supported him only a few years before! What a temptation it must have been to foresake the terror of this unknown world of sound! But, of course, this did not— I suppose could not— happen, for Schoenberg was now possessed by the determination to stand or fall upon the path which he had chosen, even if following that path meant confining the energies of his musical craft to minutiae for the piano.

In fact, for almost ten years, Schoenberg, except for dallying with his never-to-be-finished oratorio Jacob's Ladder, wrote almost nothing at all. These were years in which he wondered if he had come too far. Perhaps no man could encompass within a lifetime such an enormous transition.

The problem which faced Schoenberg was to decide in what way this void of dissonance which he had created for himself could be organized — in what way it could be manipulated in a more meaningful manner. There were so many ways in which things could go in this strange new world of dissonance; was one way necessarily more meaningful than the next? Well, Schoenberg deduced that if it was the embarrassing riches of chromatic tonal harmony which had provoked this reaction into atonality, and if it was the elaborate melodic manner of the post-Wagnerians which had associated itself with this chromatic vocabulary, then perhaps in these writhing, elongated melodic lines lay the clue to organizing the language of atonality. Would it not be possible, he thought, to build motives of such length and endurance that they would provide not only the nucleus of other motives which would relate to them, but would, perhaps, give a clue to the sense of proportionate relation between the structural components, both of melody and of harmony?

Within the aesthetic which Schoenberg employed, the basic sentiment which governed the spirit of his work was an insistence upon regarding a work of art as a totally comprehensible, totally organized object. This is the concept which has caused such great confusion about Schoenberg as an artist and which has subjected his historical theories to very serious challenge indeed; because, of course, the question which governs all art is to what degree is it entirely logical, to what degree can it be entirely worked out before the fact? Schoenberg was well aware, I suppose, that these questions
were essentially mysteries which must go lacking a firm answer and which can, at best, be expected to hold a relative answer for any creative person; but his own persuasion lay in acknowledging a conception before the fact—in which form a certain embryonic cell which represented itself as the governing factor in the creative judgment the work would spring. And, finally, after the many years of silence which Schoenberg endured in this period, his conception of the nature of this embryonic cell crystallized in the formation of what has become known as the twelve-tone technique.

This, of course, was the system which made Schoenberg the favourite target of the critics of contemporary music, for now Schoenberg was not simply asserting his own right to wander in the strange world of atonality, but he was suggesting that there was an application of logic of which this world deserved to know—a logic that would justify the use of total dissonance. At first, not only did this system seem perverse and arbitrary, it seemed almost laughably naive, for its basic premise was that this embryonic cell, the tone row or the tone series, would not itself necessarily be part of the work. Though it might appear as a melodic unit on occasion, it would essentially stand aloof from the work and simply be a source of reference to which the composer's invention would apply. But it would not be part of the work the way, let us say, the keel of a ship is part of that ship; it would lie instead like some mysterious, unborn specimen upon the composer's writing table, and from it, by contemplating and pondering it, by inventing certain numbers of variations upon it, the composer would create a work. The principles which govern the manipulation of this system—the relations of the tone row to the work—were, in Schoenberg's earliest conception of them, so elementary as to give it the appearance of a concoction of childish mathematics. And, as you can imagine, with the formulation of this strange new code, Schoenberg became the most hated, feared, laughed at, and, very occasionally, respected composer of his generation.

But the odd thing about it was that with this over-simplified, exaggerated system Schoenberg began to compose again; and, not only did he begin to compose, he embarked upon a period of about five years which contains some of the most beautiful, colourful, imaginative, fresh, inspired music which he ever wrote. Out of this concoction of childish mathematics and debatable historical perception came an
intensity, a *foie de vivre*, which knows no parallel in Schoenberg's life. How could this be, then? Of what strange alchemy was this man compounded that the sources of his inspiration flowed most freely when stemmed and checked by legislation of the most stifling kind? I suppose part of the answer lies in the fact that Schoenberg was always intrigued by numbers and afraid of numbers, and attempting to read his destiny in numbers — and, after all, what greater romance of numbers could there be than to govern one's creative life by them? I suppose part of it was due to the fact that after fifteen years awash in a sea of dissonance, Schoenberg felt himself to be on firm ground once again. Still another part of it is certainly that all music must have a system and that particularly in those moments of re-birth such as Schoenberg had led us into, it is much more necessary to adhere to the system, to accept totally its consequences, than at a later, more mature stage of its existence.

And so, with the first cautious exercises in twelve-tone composition, Schoenberg began the third major period of his creative life. Since the system itself was so new, the formal posture of Schoenberg's compositions at this time acquired, strangely for him in view of his 19th-century background, an almost entirely 18th-century foundation. The movements of these first twelve-tone works are still rather short ones and take the form of gavottes, musettes, gigues, of simple canons and mock-violent preludes, and of gentle minuets.

I suspect that eventually these earliest twelve-tone works will come to be regarded, perhaps in addition to the tonal works of the early years of the century, as the most entirely happy products of Schoenberg's life. It is true that both periods were times of conciliation and that those approaches which he made toward a liaison between twelve-tone technique and the musical forms of the 18th century could not, at best, provide more than a passing shelter. But imagine how thrilling it must have been to discover that there was a way to adapt the motivic scope of atonality and the licentious freedom of its harmonic possibilities within a familiar, formal design. It may also be that there was such a mating of conservative and radical in Schoenberg's disposition that these two periods in his life were especially happy, precisely because of that measure of conciliation, of amalgamation between those things which he dared to try and the reminiscence of those things which he dearly loved.
The works of Schoenberg's later years can be said, on the whole, to consolidate his thinking about the use of twelve-tone technique. Considering that Anton Webern was already writing in that curiously "pointillistic" manner of his during Schoenberg's life, it is perhaps significant that Schoenberg's works, as he grew older, tended to grow once again larger in scope, broader in design than the early twelve-tone compositions. Indeed, it was in this later period that he once again toyed with the idea of writing within a key-signature. There are only a few works of this kind to be sure, of which the most interesting are *Kol Nidre* for chorus, narrator, and orchestra; the *Ode to Napoleon* for reciter, string quartet, and piano; and the *Variations on a Recitative* for organ. The prevalence of tonality in these works is rather variable, the organ variations being solidly D minor (which seems to have been rather a favourite key for Schoenberg), while the *Ode to Napoleon* reflects a tonal centre only at crucial moments.

The sense of tonality here is altogether greyer, less colourful than the flamboyant chromaticism of Schoenberg's youth. In fact, this is not in the conventional sense of the word *chromaticism* at all. The harmonic language has a slight resemblance to, let us say, Max Reger in a droll mood, but we soon realize that something rather odd is going on here. The fact is that the prevailing triadic course of this music is arranged not according to the respect of tonal voice-leading but is derived out of a twelve-tone principle furnished by using a row which favours division into triadic groups. Thus the harmonization in Example 5 — the relation between the chords of B major and B minor, G major and G minor, and E-flat major and E-flat minor — forms part of a harmonic cycle of major and minor chords which with one permutation relates to the twelve-tone spectrum.

![Example 5](image-url)

*Ode to Napoleon, Opus 41*  
*Copyright 1945 G. Schirmer, Inc.*, Reprinted by permission.
No one can really say why Schoenberg began exploring an arbitrary tonal direction so late in his life. It was not in any sense, I am sure, a concession to the commercial spirit of Hollywood, his home. Whatever may have been the reason, Schoenberg's quasi-tonal works of this period provide one of the most valuable lessons that we learn from him in the use of serialism; because with these works Schoenberg refutes a good deal of the idealism of his early twelve-tone method, and he also provides important examples of the serially derived harmonic focus. That is to say, with these works we discover that serial organization does not necessarily have to operate in a world devoid of preference, and Schoenberg foreshadows a development which is now taking place — of concessions which are designed to provide a focus upon a particular harmonic unit which will recur more emphatically than statistical equality would allow. In short, these works, if not altogether satisfactory in themselves, represent one of the most important aspects of Schoenberg's later twelve-tone thinking.

These quasi-tonal works were only a very small part of Schoenberg's output in his later years. Among the major works of the American residence were the violin and piano concertos, and the string trio, all written in a more conventional twelve-tone discipline. Each of these works, despite the evident mastery of his craft, exhibits, it seems to me, a rather more aloof and dispirited profile than that which we had come to know from the Schoenberg of the 1920's and early 1930's. There is a certain coldness, an architectural precision, which seems on occasion to have taken precedence over a more fluid invention. There is also once again that curious collaboration between the aims of an earlier period — in this case the 19th century (and its architectural devices) — and the exigencies of his own serial situations; and there is, of course, despite the many legitimate reservations about his later works, some of the most beautiful music of recent times.

Well, finally, what about this man Schoenberg? What sort of influence has he wielded upon our world? I think we must admit that a fundamental change has come over the world of music, and that Schoenberg's works and ideas have been responsible for a good deal of that change. It is perfectly true that at the present moment there is such fantastic variety of musical idiom simultaneously in use that no one person can be credited or criticized for everything that is happening today. But if it is true that as Roger Sessions, I believe, once said, "All of us, no matter in what way we compose, compose differently
because of Schoenberg, what then has really been the effect of this new world of sound introduced by Schoenberg?

I think there can be no doubt that its fundamental effect has been to separate audience and composer. One doesn’t like to admit this, but it is true nonetheless. There are many people around who believe that Schoenberg has been responsible for shattering irreparably the compact between audience and composer, of 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 that is generally accepted by people today.

Certainly concert music of today, that part of it at any rate which owes a great deal to the Schoenbergian influence, plays a very small part in the life of many people. It cannot by any means claim to excite the curiosity that was generally aroused by significant new works fifty or sixty years ago. One must remember that, at the turn of the century, any new work by a Richard Strauss or a Gustav Mahler or a Rimsky-Korsakov or a Debussy was a major event not only for the cognescenti but for a very large lay audience as well. This isn’t to say that they approved everything they heard, but by and large the current musical production in those days was perhaps the most interesting part of the repertoire to its audience, and the concert programmes and operatic events of fifty or sixty years ago were heavily laden with music of that generation. It is perfectly true that the focus of music was very much narrower then than it is today. It extended back in the ordinary course of concert-going to only about the time of Beethoven, with the occasional work of Mozart or Haydn thrown in, and, for the true antiquarian, the very occasional introduction of one of the more familiar works of Johann Sebastian Bach. By contrast, today we would suffer from malnutrition on a diet like that which extends only over a hundred years or so. But have we simply transferred our interest to other periods of music because the music of our own time has failed to command our affection and attention?

No matter how little interest there may be in the more significant developments of music in our time, I think that there is little doubt that there are some areas in which the vocabulary of atonality—using this term now in a collective sense—has made quite an unobjectionable contribution to contemporary life. It has done this particularly in
media in which music furnishes but a part — operas, to a degree (if you can consider styling Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck* a “hit”), but most particularly in that curious specialty of the 20th century known as background music for cinema or television. If you really stop to listen to the music accompanying most of the Grade B horror movies that are coming out of Hollywood these days, or perhaps a TV show on space travel for children, you will be absolutely amazed at the amount of integration which the various idioms of atonality have undergone in this media.

When this background music creeps up on us subliminally, as it were, we seem to accept the devices of a dissonant vocabulary as being perfectly comprehensible. It is rather frightening though to realize that the integration of dissonance, from which all of this new music of our day has emanated, has assumed a character in the minds of many people which is satisfactory only for displaying the fundamental beastliness of the human animal and which tends to be dismissed when it attempts to lead a life of its own, a life which is capable of as wide a variety of emotional impact as that of any other musical style.

However, composers are on the whole an incredibly persuasive lot, and one can be reasonably confident that, in the end, good relations between composer and audience can be restored. It may even be that these various forms of integration in which the references of atonality have so far achieved some success — the horror movie, the science fiction space travel epic — may provide to a degree the necessary common bond. Not that I would wish to perpetuate horror movies and not that space travel may have much to do with serialism, but I suspect that the cliche nature of these devices is the public character of this atonal vocabulary, and that it will, for our own strange, twisted times, provide something of the same sort of public reference that the Lutheran chorale provided in the church services of Northern Europe in the late 16th century. There is no question that the Lutheran chorale acquainted many hostile parishioners with the strange new organization which was to become known as tonality, and I have a suspicion that the “Adventures of Captain Stratosphere” and all other such lunacies that hold us, and particularly our young, captive these days will have some significant part in making a *rapprochement* between a hostile public and the music of our time.
And so, if this happens and the estrangement is ended, then Schoenberg will not, cannot, be regarded as a perpetrator of deviltry. He will come to be regarded as one of the crucial pivot composers in musical history. The only thing that will remain for us to decide about Schoenberg will be the worth of the man’s music itself—not the justification of his historical position. A year or so ago, I was asked by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to prepare a radio documentary on Schoenberg’s life, and in doing so I interviewed a number of people who had known him; but I was careful to choose not only those who had loved him or been in awe of him, but also those who had feared him and even hated him. And so I got a fascinating cross-section of opinion when I asked each of them one question: “What will happen to Schoenberg in the year 2000?”

The opinions ranged from that of a music critic in one of the leading American national magazines who said that probably nothing very much would be in store for Schoenberg in the year 2000, in fact that his style was already in decline, to that of a celebrated composer who told me that he believed that Schoenberg’s musical expression was a very powerful but a very tortured one, and that certain of the works would undoubtedly survive as artistic reminders of the turmoil and instability of our age. There were many other points of view covering every shade of opinion, but none of them quite as absorbing as the absolutely charming quotation which I was able to find in a speech that Schoenberg had written shortly before his death and which he called “My Evolution.” In it, he began to reminisce about his youth in Vienna and told a marvelous and poignant anecdote about the Emperor Franz Josef. Here it is: “Our Emperor Franz Josef I usually honoured openings of important industrial or artistic expositions by his presence. On such occasions, the chairman of the committees were allowed to present prominent industrialists and artists to the Emperor. On these occasions, the chairman would introduce the guests in this manner—‘Your Majesty, may I present Mr. So and So, the great industrialist.’ Thereafter, turning to the gentleman, he added, ‘His Majesty, the Emperor.’ After he had been through this several times, the Emperor said softly, ‘By now, I hope the gentlemen will know who I am.’” And then Schoenberg added, “May I hope that in another fifty years they will also know who I am.”

We are too close to Schoenberg to really evaluate him. Anything that we may say about him now is either the result of guesswork or of
blind faith or of reading into his views on historical evolution an importance which we transfer to his music. But if you want my guess, and if you will accept it as from one who has made a real effort to separate the theorist from the composer and has endeavoured not to confuse the less than perfect logic which sometimes governed Schoenberg's theories with the value judgment of his work, it is then that I would guess that we will some day know indeed "who he was"; we will some day know that he was one of the greatest composers who ever lived.
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