Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Igor Stravinsky

Stravinsky: Reputation and Legacy

PLUS SOME FAMOUS WORDS ABOUT IT

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 Pathos Is Banned
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

ex. 8-16 Igor Stravinsky, *Octet for Winds* in Arthur Lourié's piano transcription, III, end

That self-evident mood of facetiousness that makes the Octet so charming, once the initial shock has worn off, gave Stravinsky another avenue for ironic play. He accompanied its appearance with a mock-forbidding manifesto, "Some Ideas about My Octuor" (using the French word for octet), which he published in a London arts magazine in January 1924. (It was the first of many such publicity pieces with which Stravinsky sought to manage the reception of his work.) Originally, this spectacularly humorless little essay must have been meant as a joke at his readers' expense, such as many French composers were then playing in accordance with the reigning postwar mood of debunkery. Stravinsky maintained the deadpan better than they, with the result that his peremptory words were taken seriously (at least by those unfamiliar with the music). Eventually Stravinsky seems to have taken them seriously himself.

Serious or no, it is an excellent gloss on the whole strange notion of "objectivity" in art that carried so much weight with composers burned by the big lies of romanticism. It begins right off with the announcement,

"My Octuor is a musical object."[36] And it proceeds from there to define a stance that a French contemporary, Charles Koechlin, writing in 1926, called "an art that wishes to be plain, brisk, non-descriptive, and even non-expressive"[37] —and therefore the only truly novel or modern movement in music. Here are a few of Stravinsky's barked-out points, every sentence a paragraph unto itself, slightly edited to compensate for his (or his translator's) faulty English, and numbered for ready reference:

- 1. My Octuor is not an "emotive" work but a musical composition based on objective elements which are sufficient in themselves.

- 2. I have excluded from this work all sorts of nuances, which I have replaced by the play of volumes.

- 3. I have excluded all nuances between the *forte* and the *piano*; I have left only the forte and the piano.

- 4. The play of these volumes is one of the two active elements on which I have based the action of my musical text, the other element being the tempos [Stravinsky has "movements"] in their reciprocal connection.

- 5. This play of tempos and volumes that puts into action the musical text constitutes the impelling force of the composition and determines its form.

- 6. I admit the commercial exploitation of a musical composition, but I do not admit its emotive exploitation. To the author belongs the emotive exploitation of his ideas, the result of which is the composition; to the executant belongs the presentation of that composition in the way designated to him by its own form.

- 7. Form, in my music, derives from counterpoint. I consider counterpoint as the only means through which the attention of the composer is concentrated on purely musical questions. Its elements also lend themselves perfectly to an architectural construction.

- 8. This sort of music has no other aim than to be sufficient in itself. In general, I consider that music is only able to solve musical problems; and nothing else, neither the literary nor the picturesque, can be in music of any real interest. The play of the musical elements is the thing.[38]

The whole antiromantic platform passes in review. Plank 1 pronounces the ban on pathos. Planks 7 and 8 declare the formalist agenda: music is architecture in time and nothing else. Plank 6 is especially arch in its refusal to honor the romantic insistence that art and artists be "disinterested," devoid of any ulterior motives (but especially commercial ones). Stravinsky was only one of many artists who were reclaiming their etymological identities as artisans or artificers—skilled makers and doers, and professionals—as opposed to dreamers, reformers, philosophers, priests, politicians, or saints.

But plank 6 had another aim as well. In conjunction with planks 2–5, which describe the volumes and tempos of the composition in absolute terms of contrasted being that preclude all "becoming" or nuance, it ties the performer's hands and proclaims the inviolability of the text. (Actually it does even more than that, explicitly equating "text" and "work" for the first time and declaring the act of performance superfluous and even maleficent: in several other planks Stravinsky equates performance with "deformation.") Plank 3 exaggerates the case somewhat. The text of the Octet has its share of crescendos and descrescendos. But more characteristic of it are markings like "*p* subito" or "sempre *p*" or "staccato e *mf* sempre." And there are frequent streams of constant note values (as in a lot of baroque music, it is true) that enforce uniformity of tempo, since there are no differences to exaggerate.

The ultimate point in the direction of inelastic (and inexpressive) uniformity was reached in the works for piano that Stravinsky wrote in the 1920s for his own use as performer. That side career was undertaken out

of necessity. Stravinsky had not only been deprived of his family inheritance by the Russian revolution, he was also deprived of the income from his most popular works because of his nationality: Russia did not sign international copyright agreements until the 1970s. The pieces he wrote for his own performance appearances were among the most severe and uncompromising of his early neoclassical pieces, partly because his piano playing while competent, was not of a sort to compete with flamboyant virtuosos like his fellow émigré Serge Rachmaninoff (1873–1943), or even with Prokofieff. He therefore sought to make a virtue of nonflamboyance (or, to put it positively, of seriousness and assiduousness). The success he had with audiences, as we know because Rachmaninoff and Prokofieff grumbled about it in their letters, shows that he shrewdly calculated the allure of elitism. Whatever Stravinsky did was "chic." Stravinsky wrote himself three such vehicles in quick succession: a three-movement Concerto for piano and wind band (1923–1924), a three-movement Sonata (or to be Gallicly exact, a *Sonate*, 1924), and a four-movement suite called *Sérénade en la* ("Serenade in A", 1925). The exclusion of strings from the accompaniment to the Concerto was characteristic of Stravinsky at this time. Strings were too "humanoid" and "expressive" for his taste (especially as they were played then, with lots of throbbing vibrato and lots of *portamento* or sliding pitch). "Wind instruments seem to me to be more apt to render a certain rigidity of the form I had in mind than other instruments," Stravinsky wrote in "Some Ideas about My Octuor," especially the strings, "which are less cold and more vague."[39] The *Sonate* is distinguished by its expression markings—or rather, its lack of them. The first and last movements are headed, simply, () = 112, as cold and precise and expressively noncommittal as one could wish.

The *Sérénade* is a little less austere than that. Its movements have titles that give at least some indication of character, and the overall title, like "divertimento," recalls an aristocratic eighteenth-century entertainment genre. The suite was composed on commission from a record company that thought Stravinsky's reputation bankable (and the composer, who had made a point of "admit[ting] the commercial exploitation of a musical composition," readily acquiesced). The contract specified that the final product would be a set of two 10-inch 78 RPM discs, played by the composer, with one movement on each side, thereby imposing a time limit of three minutes per movement.

ex. 8-17 Igor Stravinsky, *Sérénade en la*, "Rondoletto," mm. 1–27

The third movement, "Rondoletto" (Ex. 8-17), again takes the absence of expression (or at least the absence of expression markings) to an extreme. Like the outer movements of the *Sonate* it carries only a numerical metronomic indication of tempo. Even more noteworthy is the absence of any dynamic marking. The whole composition implicitly unfolds at a single level of volume—the default level, or the level at which one plays without giving any particular thought to the matter (sometimes called "mezzo-fortissimo" by "studio hacks" who make their living sight-reading commercial jingles). The only exceptions are sforzandos, used as cadential punctuation, and a single "subito meno *f*." Also spectacularly unvaried is the rhythmic motion, a nearly unrelieved stream of sixteenth notes (the only relief being those same cadential chords marked *sforzando*, and there are only two). Not even at the end of the piece does Stravinsky leave the modification of the tempo to the "deformer." He "composes in" the ritardando as a series of gear shifts, from sixteenths to triplet eighths, thence to ordinary eighths and finally to quarters and halves.

That is "rigidity of form" and "dehumanization" with a vengeance. Indeed, Stravinsky was greatly attracted to the pianola, or player piano, which could perform with a mechanized rigidity beyond human capability (further identifying "dehumanization" with the superhuman, not the sub). He spent many hours transcribing his early works for the instrument, finally writing a piece for it directly (*Étude for pianola*, 1917); and he did his best, as his own piano performances from the period attest, to turn himself into a walking pianola. It would appear, then, that a memento of *futurismo*, the maximalist worship of the Machine Age, lingered —ironically!—in Stravinsky's "neoclassicism," further compromising its ostensibly retrospective character. It was meant to be—and certainly did become, for awhile—the music of the future.

Notes:

(36) Igor Stravinsky, "Some Ideas about My Octuor," *The Arts*, January 1924; reprinted in Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p. 528.

(37) Charles Koechlin, "Le 'Retour à Bach,'" *La Revue musicale* VIII (1926): pp. 1–2.

(38) Stravinsky, "Some Ideas," pp. 529–31.

(39) *Ibid.*, p. 528.

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CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions

Prokofieff; Satie Again; Berg's *Wozzeck; Neue Sachlichkeit, Zeitoper, Gebrauchsmusik* (Hindemith, Krenek, Weill); Korngold, Rachmaninoff, and a New *Stile Antico*

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
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BREACHING THE FOURTH WALL

Cynical modernism born of postwar disillusion was nowhere more pervasive than in theater, hitherto preeminently the art of illusion. "Illusionist," in fact, was the name derisively given by the hardened modernists of the twenties to the traditional theater, which thought of itself as realistic. There was no contradiction, really. Precisely to the extent that it strove to convince spectators that the staged and scripted action they were witnessing was real, the realistic theater obviously traded in illusion. Not that anybody was ever really convinced, of course; but audiences were eager to play along with conventions, whether of romanticism or of realism, for the sake of the emotional payoff they received in return for their "willing suspension of disbelief, which constitutes poetic faith."[1] (The famous quoted phrase is by the English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge.)

One of the main conventions on which theatrical illusions of reality depended was the imaginary "fourth wall" that separated the audience from the players, who were never allowed to see through it. All illusion of reality would be destroyed the moment the players showed any awareness of the audience's presence, let alone addressed it directly. The only traditional genres in which the fourth wall could be breached were farce and satire, which made the least pretense to realism, and even occasionally mocked it. But what was an exceptional "special effect" in traditional theater became ubiquitous, as an aspect of irony, after the Great War, when artists became compulsorily self-conscious, and art had to advertise itself as art as a pledge of good faith.

The playwright most often cited as the protagonist of this move was Luigi Pirandello, already named for us by Ortega in a passage quoted in the previous chapter. As its very title suggests, Pirandello's play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* ("Six characters in search of an author," 1921), challenges every convention of the illusionist theater, at times by ironically exaggerating them. The characters, refugees from an unfinished play, invade a rehearsal of a different play and, flagrantly breaching the fourth wall, confront the author, the actors, and the director with the request that they resolve the horrifying drama of betrayal and incest, murder and suicide in which they have become involved.

By thus insisting (or pretending to insist) that there are levels of reality within the theatrical illusion, Pirandello blurs the line between theatrical illusion and lived reality and directly exhorts the audience to ponder what he has done. And by portraying (or pretending to portray) the characters as independent agents (and therefore human), the whole "realistic" theatrical enterprise, the conventions on which it is based, and all parties to them from author to audience, are implicitly accused of voyeurism, taking pleasure in the misery of others. Like Stravinsky, but somewhat earlier, Pirandello unmasked the esthetic illusion to expose its ethical infractions. He used art to indict art and mock its audience for complacently believing in the "vitalist" fallacy.

But Pirandello had forerunners, and one of them was a composer. Serge Prokofieff (1891–1953), whom we met in the previous chapter as one of the "neoclassical" Stravinsky's skeptical younger colleagues, actually

anticipated Stravinsky in stylistic pastiche, and anticipated Pirandello in the ironizing game. As often happens, there was more of personal rivalry than of principled opposition in Prokofieff's demurrers to Stravinsky. In the summer of 1917, between the two big political upheavals that shook Russia during that turbulent year (first the February revolution that toppled the tsar, then the October coup d'état that put the Soviet government in place), Prokofieff sought escape by going to a country house where there was no piano on which to experiment, and both as a lark and as an exercise to discipline his ear, writing a symphony "in the style of Haydn."

Needless to say, it was no such thing. Rather it was a "culinary" romp of a kind that, as we saw in the previous chapter, composers had turned out all through the nineteenth century (and particularly in Russia). Its "eighteenth-century" was the usual imaginary one, pasteurized and homogenized: Prokofieff's third movement, for example, was not a minuet, as in any Haydn symphony, but an anachronistic gavotte (Ex. 9-1). In view of the quirky harmonic progression that breaks every rule of eighteenth-century voice leading, moreover, it is obvious that Prokofieff was prompted to write his gavotte less by the example of Bach than by the example of Ambroise Thomas or Chaikovsky, as displayed in Exx. 8-3 and 8-4.

The "neoclassicism" of Prokofieff's "Classical Symphony," then, was not really modernist—another reminder that stylistic "retrospectivism" as such was neither a necessary component of neoclassicism or, when present, a sufficient one. It can amount, as in Prokofieff's "Classical Symphony," to nothing more than ingratiating nostalgia. Prokofieff's next major work, however, though it was not stylistically retrospective at all, was a milestone in the postwar "neoclassical" project. And although it took the form of a genuinely funny comic opera called *Lyubov' k tryom apel'sinam* ("The love for three oranges"), it was found (like Pirandello's comedies) to be anything but ingratiating by its early audiences. "They found mockery and challenges and grotesques in my *Oranges*," the composer wrote, compounding irony with irony, "while all I had done was write a merry show."[2]

ex. 9-1 Serge Prokofieff, "Classical Symphony," III (Gavotte), in the composer's piano arrangement

Notes:

(1) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Chap. 14.

(2) Sergei Prokofieff, "Avtobiografiya," in *S. S. Prokof'yev: Materialï, dokumentï, vospominaniya*, ed. S. I. Shlifshteyn (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1961), p. 177.

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Serge Rachmaninoff

Serge Prokofieff

Love for Three Oranges

ART AS PLAYTHING

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
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Prokofieff wrote his merry show in New York, having joined the great wave of emigration that followed the revolutions of 1917, a disastrous "brain drain" for Russia that cost it a number of leading composers, including (besides Stravinsky and Prokofieff) the towering figure of Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) who in addition to being the most prominent Russian composer of his generation was a world-renowned piano virtuoso and an outstanding conductor as well.(The transliterated spellings Prokofieff and Rachmaninoff are those that the composers themselves adopted for professional use abroad.)

fig. 9-1 Serge Prokofieff, by Pyotr Konchalovsky (1876–1956).

Prokofieff left Russia by traveling east, so as to avoid the battlefields of World War I. He sailed from Vladivostok, a Siberian port on the Pacific, and made his way to New York by way of Yokohama, Japan, and San Francisco. He had a draft scenario for the new opera with him on board ship, given him by the famous theatrical director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940), with whom he had planned to collaborate. By the time he reached his American destination he had elaborated the libretto into its final form. Having signed a contract with an American impresario, he wrote the opera (in Russian) in 1919 in New York, for performance in 1921 in Chicago (in French).

Prokofieff's libretto was an adaptation of a draft by Meyerhold that was an adaptation of a commedia dell'arte scenario (that is, a blueprint for improvisation by a troupe of masked players) by Carlo Gozzi (1720–1806), a Venetian "gentleman" playwright, that was itself an adaptation of a pair of fairy tales that were published in Naples in 1634. With every telling the work became further encrusted with theatrical artifice and esthetic doctrine, so that by the time Prokofieff was through with it, *The Love for Three Oranges*

was the epitome of "art about art," almost more Pirandellian than Pirandello.

The story, stemming from the old Neapolitan tales, was silly simplicity itself. An old king, to cure his son's melancholia, oils the pavement in front of the palace in hopes that somebody will take a tumble and make the prince laugh. The victim turns out to be the dread witch Fata Morgana, who takes revenge by casting a spell on the prince, causing him to fall in love with three oranges, which he must seek though it take him to the ends of the earth. Inside the last of them, he finds the beautiful princess who becomes his bride. (The other oranges also contained fairy princesses, who shriveled up and died when the prince did not give them water in time.)

The *fiaba* or theatricalized fable that Gozzi fashioned on the basis of this story was already a polemical work—the sort of tract or pamphlet in the guise of art that became suddenly popular again in the aftermath of the Great War. Gozzi's aristocratic taste had been offended by the vulgarized theater of his day, as exemplified by modern playwrights who turned out sham tragedies, "in which you find characters hurling themselves from windows or turrets without breaking their necks, and similar miracles"[3] (here we might substitute the bloated musical harangues of Mahler or Scriabin), or equally sham comedies of manners that "titillate under pretext of moral instruction" (and here we might substitute the gaudy operas of Strauss).

The quotes are from a wholly superfluous but exceptionally detailed scene in Gozzi's otherwise rough scenario, which he called the *contrasto in terzo*: a "quarrel trio" in which three characters, one of them the author's obvious stand-in, for no good reason declare and debate their preferences in drama. When Meyerhold fleshed out Gozzi's scenario for some performances in St. Petersburg in 1914, he seized upon the "quarrel trio" and expanded it to the point where it became, both temporally and spatially, the frame of the entire play.

The spatial frame consisted of twin turrets on opposite sides of the stage, housing a collection of clowns representing a bunch of "esthetes" noisily advocating contradictory convictions about what drama ought to be. They form the onstage audience for the theater-within-a-theater in which the action takes place. This much was already a standard practice, if an unusual one, in the traditional theater when ironic distancing was called for: recall the players in *Hamlet*, or, more recently, the puppet show in Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. But Meyerhold took it so much further than any previous dramatist as to turn the difference into one not just of degree but of kind: many theater historians regard his *Love for Three Oranges* as the very cradle of modernist theater.

Meyerhold's action began with a parade in which the actors portraying the esthetes—divided into camps of "Realistic Comedians" and "High Tragedians"—entered dueling with quills. The fight was broken up by a trio of "cranks" or eccentrics. One, restraining the Comedians, shouts: "We are fed up with your wares, contemptible farce-mongers, these four- and five-act comedies without any content at all, but with the inevitable pistol shot at the end!"[4] Another, holding off the Tragedians, thunders: "We are bored to death with plays that have such a load of dreary philosophy and such a dearth of healthy laughter, to say nothing of stagecraft!" The third, pointing through the fourth wall at the audience (the real one, that is, sitting in the dark), said, "Look—they are waiting there for some actors who can show them the real thing!" The battle, thus joined, continued in an undertone, and with frequent eruptions, throughout the play. The constant comment from the onstage "audience," and its strenuous exhortations to the actors, completely destroying any sense of theatrical illusion, furnished the play's temporal frame.

Meyerhold's *Love for Three Oranges*, then, was perhaps the earliest application, at least in such an overwhelming dose, of the illusion-destroying "art as art" gimmickry that would within a couple of decades become a modernist cliché. What makes it historically so significant is the clarity of its descent from an eighteenth-century aristocratic model, thus connecting two important strands in what would become the heritage of postwar "neoclassicism." Even if Prokofieff had never set it, Meyerhold's response to Gozzi would have been a prime document of the nascent modernist manner and its sources. But since Prokofieff did set it, it becomes an indispensable link in the history of twentieth-century opera as well.

Prokofieff's opera is a "document" in its own right, since Prokofieff seized upon Meyerhold's distancing ideas

and expanded them as much as Meyerhold had expanded Gozzi's. To Meyerhold's Comedians, Tragedians, and Cranks (the latter's number upped to ten), Prokofieff added a couple of opera-specific groups of his own devising: "Lyricists," forever demanding "romantic love, moons, tender kisses," and "Empty Heads," bent on "entertaining nonsense, witty double entendres, fine costumes." In this way Prokofieff thought to cover every possible sort of hackneyed operatic situation and the sort of taste that demanded it.

The running gag in Prokofieff's *Love for Three Oranges* is the way in which the Comedians, Tragedians, Lyricists, and Empty Heads butt in whenever the action approaches one of their pet stereotypes to egg it on; but of course in so doing they unerringly puncture whatever mood it is that they are trying to abet. The Cranks, eager to foil all factions (but particularly the Tragedians), do more than that. They actually intervene in the plot—Pirandello-fashion, we may be tempted to say, but before Pirandello—to change its course. The audience in the theater, like Pirandello's audience, is both entertained and given lots to ponder.

The third scene of act III, in which the Prince opens the magic fruit and finds the princesses, would by rights have been the big "pathos scene" in the opera. It has love, it has death, and it bids fair to supply all the attendant emotions in abundance. But the onstage spectators quash everything. The three princesses come out of their oranges dying of thirst, each begging for water more insistently — exactly a major second's worth more insistently — than the last: see Ex. 9-2. Between the appearance of the second princess and that of the third, a passing platoon of soldiers carries off the two corpses most unsentimentally. When the third princess is about to die of thirst, and the Tragedians are licking their chops at the prospect, the Cranks fetch from their turret a bucket of water, deposit it at center stage, and save Princess Ninetta's life (Ex. 9-3). No tragedy.

ex. 9-2a Serge Prokofieff, *Love for Three Oranges*, Act III, scene 3, fig. 384 (the first princess begs for water)

The Prince now sings at relative length of his love for the Princess: his little solo, forty measures in all, is actually the longest "aria" in the whole stingy opera. When the Princess begins to respond, the Lyricists smell a love duet in the making and shout "At last! Something romantic, sentimental!" The Cranks hiss at them to shut up. Their fight distracts the lovers from their singing. No love duet. These interferences by the "audience" on stage carry to the audience in the hall a message that Ortega, that happy theorist of "dehumanization," would have gladly endorsed: For better or worse, the meddling Cranks affirm, the play is literally their plaything—and art is ours. That is the affable side of disillusion. Art is fun again. Expect no more from it.

Notes:

(3) *Useless Memoirs of Carlo Gozzi*, trans. John Addington Symonds (London, 1962), p. 168.

(4) Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Lyubov' k tryom apel'sinam, zhurnal Doktora Dapertutto*, Vol. I (1914), p. 32.

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Serge Prokofieff

Erik Satie

A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARD THE "CLASSICS"?

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
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Nicolette: Give me something to drink! Right away, or else...
Linette: Just a drop! My eyes grow dim...

ex. 9-2b Serge Prokofieff, *Love for Three Oranges*, Act III, scene 3, fig. 391 (the second princess begs for water)

Unlike so many modernist classics, then, *The Love for Three Oranges* is easy to enjoy once the shock of its novelty has worn off. It was one of the harbingers of that revolution in taste, begotten (it is true) of misery, that cultivated hygienic belly laughs to replace the neurasthenic wheezing of prewar "decadence," a therapeutic against late, late romanticism's gangrenous grandiosity. From this standpoint the emblematic moment, just as it was for Gozzi, is the scene of the hypochondriac Prince's cure in act II. At the sight of Fata Morgana's knobby knees and withered behind, the Prince goes into gales of laughter, represented in the music by a little set piece over an ostinato (Ex. 9-4a), and with the Prince's "ha-ha-ha-HA" an inevitable parody of the opening unison in... need it be named?

The new debunking spirit was perhaps most vivid when the objects debunked were the untouchable icons of the past. Beethoven's Fifth came in for ribbing from many sides. Stravinsky quoted its last movement in a little *Souvenir d'un marche boche* ("Souvenir of a 'Kraut' March") that he contributed to a lavish art book that was sold in 1915 to raise money for Belgian war relief (Ex. 9-4b). In a ballet called *El sombrero de tres picos* ("The three-cornered hat"), produced by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1919, the Spanish composer

Manuel de Falla (1876–1946) poked more fun at it (Ex. 9-4c) when a bunch of asinine gendarmes come knocking peremptorily and "fatefully" at someone's door.

But as early as 1913, Erik Satie had already spoofed the Fifth's colossal coda in a cute little piano piece with a ridiculously serious subject: "de Podophthalma," the last of a suite of three *Embryons desséchées* ("Dried embryos"), music purporting to give a scientific description of marine life (Ex. 9-4d; it depicts crayfish hunting for food and incorporates the French equivalent of "A-Hunting We Will Go" in addition to the Beethoven reference). A deliberate study in pompous triviality, it passes a wicked judgment on the romantic taste for big statements in art.

ex. 9-2c Serge Prokofieff, *Love for Three Oranges*, Act III, scene 3, fig. 415 (Ninetta, the third princess, begs for water)

ex. 9-3 Serge Prokofieff, *Love for Three Oranges*, Act III, scene 3, fig. 418 (Princess Ninetta gets her drink)

ex. 9-4a Caricature of Beethoven's Fifth, Serge Prokofieff, *Love for Three Oranges*, Act I, scene 1

ex. 9-4b Caricature of Beethoven's Fifth, Igor Stravinsky, *Souvenir d'un marche boche*

ex. 9-4c Caricature of Beethoven's Fifth, Manuel da Falla, *El sombrero de tres picos*

ex. 9-4d Caricature of Beethoven's Fifth, Erik Satie, "De podophthalma"
(from *Embryons desséchées*, no. 3)

Of course to a card-carrying Frenchman like Satie, or a Russian in wartime like Stravinsky, Beethoven's Germanness was both bait and butt. But the mood spread widely after the war, when disgust at Germany translated into disgust at artistic pretensions to weight and significance, especially in music (the "German" art par excellence, at least in its weightier manifestations). Part of the postwar cult of irony, certainly on the part of "Allied" (or, in Falla's case, "neutral") composers, was de-Germanification. Wagner, banned in many Allied countries during the war, did not come back immediately; and when he did, it was no longer with the sense that he bore the banner of the universal tradition in music, but very much as a German.

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Alban Berg

Wozzeck

Wozzeck

"HOW" VS. "WHAT"

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Yet in the final analysis, *The Love for Three Oranges*, being a farce that can be read as satire, came by its irony the old-fashioned way, as did all the little spoofs quoted in Ex. 9-4. Their frostiness and cynicism had a long history in musical comedy. And Prokofieff's ingratiating music, while modern enough and (when needed) grotesque, is audience-friendly in a manner that comedy traditionally demands. In the guise of an orchestral suite it has been a repertory piece since the time of the premiere. For all the artifice expended on it by three successive adapters, moreover, the opera makes a fairly unpretentious impression, as a farce must. Coming in 1919 (or in 1921, to give it the date of its first performance) it might well have proven an isolated experiment in "farcical maximalism" rather than a bellwether.

It was only when devices of ironic distance comparable to those in *The Love for Three Oranges* began to show up in operas with serious or tragic or pretentious subjects, or operas by German composers who still took Beethovenesque notions of musical greatness at face value, that a "sea change" in the cultural atmosphere was incontestable. Such subjects would have received a very different sort of treatment from musical dramatists who traded unself-consciously in empathy and sincerity—or rather, who could still trade unself-consciously in the sort of illusions of empathy and sincerity that artists in the romantic tradition were trained to administer.

Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck*, conceived in 1914 and composed between 1919 and 1922, is now widely regarded as the most serious and significant opera to emerge from the postwar decade. Despite its arcane harmonic idiom ("atonality" à la Schoenberg, the composer's teacher) and its great difficulty for performers, the opera became an immediate international hit after its Berlin premiere in December 1925, with seventeen productions in Germany and ten abroad by 1933, when performances were temporarily halted by the Nazi regime. By now it is a staple of the operatic repertory everywhere. (The last bastion of resistance, New York's Metropolitan Opera, fell before it in 1958.) Productions of it are not newsmakers; they are expected, and accepted, the world over.

fig. 9-2 *Wozzeck*, autograph score page from Act I, scene 4 (Passacaglia): Wozzeck and the Doctor.

Any attempt to account for the "unaccountable" success of this "difficult" "atonal" composition must of course begin where it began, with the story. Berg based the opera on *Woyzeck*, a brutal naturalistic play by Georg Büchner (1813–37), a short-lived and for a long time very obscure German writer who had been rediscovered by the expressionists. Inspired by a notorious crime story as reported in the newspapers, the play depicted the mental and moral degeneration of a miserable, much-despised soldier, who, crazed by jealousy and despair, murders his mistress. One sees the passive and dullwitted title character abused by all with whom he comes in contact—by his captain, who treats him as a personal servant; by a doctor, who employs him as a guinea pig for dietary experiments; by a conceited drum major who seduces his mistress Marie and beats him up into the bargain; and by Marie herself, who taunts him over his humiliation—until even this human block of wood is provoked to crude and tragic action.

Left unfinished at Büchner's death, *Woyzeck* was speculatively pieced together from a sheaf of unfinished

variants that even left the ending in doubt, by an editor who misspelled the title as *Wozzeck* thanks to the author's difficult handwriting. It was first published in 1879 and first performed in Munich in 1913. The first Vienna performance, which Berg attended, took place the next year. Berg excerpted fifteen of its twenty-seven brief scenes and set them practically verbatim, the way Debussy set Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Thus rendered even more compact and concentrated than the original play, Berg's opera traded brazenly in the kind of shocking violence made popular by the operas of the verismo school. The abject title character, moreover, and the world as seen through his increasingly demented eyes, were a natural for expressionistic — that is, luridly subjective — depiction.

Unlike the laconic original, which made a studied attempt at deadpan reportage, Berg's musical treatment was highly manipulative: "operatic" in the fullest (indeed, potentially derogatory) sense of the word, replete with authorial interventions in the form of orchestral interludes that commented on the action — in the Wagnerian manner, one might say, or like a Greek chorus — by the use of leitmotifs. Berg saw himself as exposing a social problem — that of society's ill treatment of *wir arme Leut*, "us poor folk" as Wozzeck calls his kind in the first scene, a phrase that reverberates thereafter as a verbal leitmotif. Not only did Berg give it a musical counterpart which could function much more freely in the opera's texture than a catchphrase can ever do in a play, but he bent every effort to acting as his title character's defense attorney, as he frankly put it in an essay on the opera, justifying his crime through "an appeal to humanity through its representatives, the audience."[5]

The opera's classic status testifies to the composer's success in accomplishing these goals — not that they are at all unusual goals for an opera composer. What was exceedingly unusual was the way in which Berg went about the task, which only seemed to place gratuitous obstacles in his path. For the relationship between the humanizing music and the horrific subject is not at all direct. It is mediated through a huge and potentially distracting—or at least distancing—barrage of composerly virtuosity.

Some of that virtuosity was of a familiar kind—brilliantly colored orchestration, mimicry of many kinds of "ambient" music (folksongs, marches, waltzes, all reflected through an "atonal" distorting mirror), intricate motivic work and leitmotivic transformations. Wagner and Strauss, too, were ostentatious musical manipulators, and Wagner's operatic reforms succeeded at least in part because he was able to turn his project into a staggeringly impressive composerly tour de force. But the Wagnerian or Straussian virtuosity, however allied it may have been with "symphonic" techniques, was self-avowedly "liberatory." It aimed at the destruction of "rounded" or discrete musical forms and the enabling of a new time-scale based on whole acts, freeing the composer to react without "purely musical" mediation to the shape of the drama.

Berg's opera, in stark contrast, invokes a whole panoply of discrete ("closed") musical forms and genres; and what is more, the forms and genres were those of instrumental music, seemingly alien and irrelevant to opera, some of them just as obsolescent as the ones Stravinsky was reviving in his piano and chamber music. The first scene of the opera, for example, in which Wozzeck is shown shaving the Captain and putting up with the latter's self-absorbed and insensitive maunderings, is cast in the form of a grotesque orchestral suite, as follows:

mm. 1–29: "Präludium"

30–50: "Pavane"

51–64: "Cadenza" (solo viola)

65–108: "Gigue"

109–114: "Cadenza" (contrabassoon)

115–136: "Gavotte" (mm. 127–132 "Double I"; mm. 133–136 "Double II")

136–153: "Air"

153–171: "Reprise" (Präludium in reverse)

ex. 9-5 Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*, Act I, scene 1, "Air" ("Wir arme Leut")

It has been pointed out time and again that, so far as the listener in the opera house is concerned, all of this information is altogether arcane and immaterial. One could go further and show that the designations do not even fit. A pavane was a sixteenth-century dance in duple meter and with three repeated strains. (Obsolete even in Bach's day, it was the sort of esoteric item only musicologists were likely to know about in Berg's day, except for a modish piano piece by Ravel that might conceivably have been Berg's "source.") Berg's duple meter is disguised by triplets and is not consistently maintained. Instead of three strains there is something like a loose ternary form. The gigue and the gavotte, while conforming a little more to their prototypes, are still unrecognizable except to an analyst of the score who has been alerted to their presence. (The "doubles" of the gavotte, for example, do go through successive rhythmic diminutions — first to triplets, then to sixteenths and thirty-seconds — but without having recognized the gavotte one cannot know that the faster rhythms represent doubles, or even variations.) If we accept that these references to baroque dances are in-jokes, then we are back to Ortega's ironically "jesting" art, quite at odds with the cathartic social tragedy that brought *Wozzeck* success in the opera house. Of course, the opening scene *is* largely satiric (at the expense of the idiotic Captain, who fancies himself a philosopher). But it has one very serious moment.

Wozzeck's speech about "us poor folk" (Ex. 9-5), and that moment is not exempted from the in-joke, being designated "Air" in apparent reference to Bach's famously lyrical Air from the D-major orchestral suite with which it shares its time signature, and which was known separately to millions as the "Air on the G String," after a famously sentimental concert transcription by the German violinist August Wilhelmj.

But if Wozzeck's "Air" is part of the ironic or distanced substratum that haunts the scene, his actual music is treated virtually without irony, and has two moments of special poignancy. One is the setting of the first three words, which, as we know, became one of the opera's chief leitmotifs. Characteristically for a composer in Schoenberg's orbit, Berg treats the leitmotif (according to the principles of "emancipated dissonance") both as a melody and as a harmony, the latter being the sum of all its notes played as a piquant and memorable "seventh chord" (minor triad plus major seventh) of a kind that never occurs in diatonic practice, hence has no classified status in "tonal" music (Ex. 9-6).

The other special moment comes slightly earlier, at the join between the first and second doubles of the "Gavotte" (Ex. 9-7). The Captain has reproached Wozzeck for having a child out of wedlock, and therefore unbaptized. Wozzeck reminds the Captain of Jesus's charity, quoting his words from the Bible, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." The whole passage is set off at a slower tempo than the rest, which becomes *Noch langsamer* ("even slower") at the biblical quote, followed by a veritable spotlight of a *Molto rit.* at the end of the measure. The harmony comes to rest, at the last beat, on a dominant-seventh chord that is prepared (through an augmented sixth) as if it were the actual dominant of C minor, and the violins corroborate its status with a throbbing, extended G—an unequivocally "tonal" moment of repose to coincide with, and underscore, a rare moment of unfeigned human warmth.

ex. 9-6 Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*, "Wir arme Leut" leitmotif

"...even if nobody says Amen before he was made. The Lord spake: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me!'"
"What is He saying there? What kind of weird answer is that?"

ex. 9-7 Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*, Act I, scene 1, "Quasi Gavotte,"
transition from "Double I" to "Double II"

Both the musical effect and the attendant mood are broken by the next words from the infuriatingly obtuse Captain, accompanied by the usual busily "motivic" atonal web. But that atonal web has now been characterized, through contrast, as representing the inhumane, uncaring world that "Wir arme Leut" are forced to inhabit, as it is perceived by the opera's tortured protagonist. Berg has turned his irony on his own "normal" musical language, which is now paradoxically branded as abnormal or subnormal in its distance from true human feeling. This brief ironic byplay, contrasting the "tonal" with the "atonal," is redeemed at the other end of the opera with a wrenching cathartic force that must account for much of the opera's success with audiences who could not care less about gavottes, let alone "atonality."

That cathartic moment depends for its effect on the audience's enduring the ugliness of the central dramatic

intrigue, Marie's infidelity with the Drum Major. It is developed over the whole course of act II, the five scenes of which are cast, according to Berg's arcanely jesting scheme, as a five-movement symphony:

> Scene 1: "Sonata," in which Marie, preening herself after her night with the Drum Major, nevertheless accepts money from Wozzeck to care for their child, and experiences a moment of bad conscience; Scene 2: "Fantasia and fugue," in which the Captain and the Doctor, taunting Wozzeck, plant the first inkling in his mind that Marie has been unfaithful; Scene 3: "Largo," in which Wozzeck confronts Marie, who is cold and defiant; Scene 4: "Scherzo," in which Wozzeck sees Marie dancing in the arms of the Drum Major; Scene 5: "Introduction and Rondo," in which the Drum Major beats Wozzeck and gloats over him.

Having experienced the ultimate humiliation, the formerly passive Wozzeck is now ready for the retaliatory action that is displayed in act III. The relationship of the music to the action is still mediated through a scrim of ingenious technical studies, but no longer does the composer invoke arcane or "classic" genres. Rather, each scene is designated an "Invention," concerned with some elemental musical particle. Their "abstract" musical procedures are vivid and readily apprehended along with the drama. Where in the earlier acts there had been harsh raillery and satire, there is nothing now but a headlong dash to catastrophe.

- • Scene 1, in which Marie reads from the Bible and repents, is called an "Invention on a Theme," and takes the form of a theme, six brief variations, and a concluding "fugue" (actually just a fugal exposition), all of them duly marked off in the score, but just as easily followed by ear. The last two variations, in which Marie reads with mounting emotion, "lapse" into the key of F minor, repeating the effect already encountered in Wozzeck's colloquy with the Captain, whereby tonal harmony underscores the moments of particular emotional warmth, as if to convey its pressure.
- • Scene 2, the most famous tour de force in the opera, is called an "Invention on a Note," and depicts the murder, by the side of a lake. It is haunted from beginning to end by the note B, sometimes (as at the beginning) held out as a bass pedal; sometimes reiterated in a high register in a weird tone-color like string flageolets (artificial harmonics) or xylophone; or sometimes sustained in a tremolo. At the climactic moment (Ex. 9-8), when the moon rises blood-red and Wozzeck comes after Marie with a knife, the B is simultaneously sustained by the strings as a pedal in six octaves, pervading the whole range of the orchestra, and also beaten as a tattoo by the kettledrum that crescendos to the moment of the lethal deed and decrescendos to the end of the scene. Twice the note is prominently sung: first by Wozzeck, unaccompanied by the orchestra, to the word "Nothing," when the nervous Marie asks what's on his mind; then by Marie, screaming "Help!" as Wozzeck plunges the dagger into her throat. (This moment will resonate with the same cry in Schoenberg's *Erwartung*—Ex. 6-16—in the memory of anyone who has heard it.) The entr'acte following this scene consists of two unison Bs played by the orchestra in deafening crescendos (Ex. 9-9), leading into
- • Scene 3, in which Wozzeck's deed is suspected by the denizens of a tavern to which he has repaired. It is called "Invention on a Rhythm," and consists of myriad repetitions of the eight-note rhythm first heard in the thundering bass drum during the entr'acte and then hacked out as the curtain goes up on "an out-of-tune upright piano on stage," as the score specifies. The rhythm is derived from the start of Wozzeck's shout at the climax of scene 2, *Ich nicht, Marie! und kein Andrer auch nicht*! ("Not I, Marie, and no one else either," in Ex. 9-8). Probably the most arcanely "irrelevant" and inaudible musical jest in the score is the fact that the series of instrumental entrances that take place during, and contribute to, the first big crescendo in the entr'acte are spaced out according to this rhythm, something that can be discovered only by analyzing the score. As the scene progresses, the rhythm is set against itself at many different rates of speed over a basso ostinato that also consists of repetitions of it, all symbolizing Wozzeck's mounting fear and guilt.

("What did you say?")
"–Nothing...."
"Look how red the moon has risen!"
"Like bloody steel!"
"Why are you shivering? What do you want?"
"Not me, Marie! And no one else either!"
"Help."

ex. 9-8 Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*, Act III, scene 2, the murder

ex. 9-9 Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*, Act III, Entr'acte between scenes 2 and 3

- • Scene 4 is an "Invention on a Six-Note Chord." The chord that pervades it would once again have felt right at home in *Erwartung*: it can be construed as consisting of an "atonal triad" plus a stack of perfect fourths (Ex. 9-10). The reference may well have been intentional, since Wozzeck is depicted in this scene as gripped, like the mad protagonist of Schoenberg's "monodrama," by anxious forebodings. He returns to the scene of the crime, where he has left incriminating evidence behind. He finds the murder weapon and throws it into the lake, but, fearing it is too near the shore, wades out and drowns. (This climactic event was contributed by the editor who prepared Büchner's unfinished play for posthumous publication; it could not have been Büchner's intention, because it departs from the historical events to which the playwright was otherwise faithful, and Büchner has his Woyzeck reappear in a later scene.) The Doctor and the Captain happen by, hear ominous sounds arising from the lake, and flee. The sounds made by the waters closing in on Wozzeck are another reminiscence of *Erwartung*: they consist of overlapping chromatic scales at different tempos, like the final "dissolve" in

Schoenberg's opera.

ex. 9-10 "Leitharmony" in Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*, Act III, scene 4

- • Scene 5, designated "Invention on an Eighth-Note Motion" depicts Wozzeck's and Marie's little son on his hobbyhorse, uncomprehending when cruelly taunted by a group of children with his mother's death (Ex. 9-11). It is cast in meter, and the eighth notes, which represent the children at play, never let up. The harmony at the end of the scene (and the opera) is poignant: the eighth-note ostinato begins to oscillate between two chords that together contain five notes of a whole-tone scale. The remaining note, G, is played by the strings together with its fifth, D, which is not part of the whole-tone scale, but by consonantly supporting the G gives it the weight of a tonic root whose third, B, is found within the whole-tone ostinato—thus bringing the whole wretched and violent action to rest on what is to all intents and purposes an unconventionally prepared but esthetically conventional, and even placid, tonic triad. That incongruous "unearned" placidity, distilling the perspective of the dopey little boy who is left alone onstage at the end, casts an ironic pall over everything that preceded it.

The ostensibly "abstract" inventions through which Berg shaped the scenes of act III are less overtly ironic, less obviously a jest in their relationship to the starkly naturalistic action, than those of the preceding acts. In every case, the inventive play unfolds through pressing ostinatos that symbolize through analogy the obsessions that now drive the maddened title character. By turns we are bombarded with obsessively repeated pitches, rhythms, and chords as the opera runs its obsessive, bloody course. The famous entr'acte between scenes 2 and 3—the unison crescendos on the symbolically fraught B—returns us frankly to the world of expressionism, allowing us momentarily to inhabit the mind of the deranged antihero whose head is throbbing with the memory of his crime. And surely no art was ever less ironical than expressionism.

ex. 9-11 Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*, Act III, scene 5, end

Yet the separation of elements—now pitches, now rhythms, now chords—is even here supremely "artful" and showy. The moment we notice the technical tours de force that constitute the portrayal (and here we can hardly help noticing them) we are put at a distance from the events portrayed in a manner that Ortega y Gasset, in his famous tract of 1925 (the year of *Wozzeck's* premiere), equated purely and simply, and very approvingly, with the nature of art itself. Despite all the vividly "veristic" and "expressionistic" aspects that Berg inherited from his immediate predecessors, and even maximalized, there is also, in ironic contradiction, the same refusal (or inability) to make his art "transparent" that characterizes virtually all of postwar modernism, and that completely contradicts the aims of verismo or expressionism—and, behind them, of romanticism.

Notes:

(5) Alban Berg, lecture on *Wozzeck* (1929); Hans Redlich, *Alban Berg: Versuch einer Würdigung* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1957), p. 327.

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Alban Berg

Wozzeck

PUTTING THINGS "IN QUOTES"

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The passage in Ortega's essay subtitled "A Few Drops of Phenomenology" (after the branch of philosophy that inquires into the nature of appearances and perception) can help us understand Berg's predicament. Ortega imagines a deathbed scene witnessed by the wife of the dying man, his doctor, a reporter, and a painter.[6] Their various relationships to the event are analyzed in turn. The author's conclusion is that as the four witnesses are each more detached from the event emotionally than the last, they are by the same token increasingly observant of it in all its details. It is that maximum detachment that enables the artist "objectively" to channel the emotions of the lived reality into significant form. That form then becomes, for the artist and those who truly appreciate his art *as* art, the object and the aim of contemplation. And that is irony at its highest and best, no longer to be simply identified with humor. It is the irony that transforms experience into art.

Wozzeck is a monument to that idea—or rather, it reflects the historical moment in which that idea achieved its completest triumph over the earlier, "vitalist" view of art as a mirror reflection or reproduction of lived reality, valuable only to the extent that it transmitted to observers the feelings of a participant. Although dependent for its originating impulse on "lived" reality—in Ortega's case the great man's death, in Berg's the historical crime that had first served Büchner as an inspiration—the artwork becomes a part of objective reality in its own right, with its own independent claim on our attention that arises out of its skillful making. Its effect on us is the product of the artist's manipulation of his materials, not the "content" alone; and while that is of course true of all art, art is now under an obligation to "show its hand" and make its manipulations known.

This applies even—or especially—to the great expressive climax in *Wozzeck*, where Berg made his most direct appeal to empathy. The entr'acte between scenes 4 and 5 of act III has its own place in the composer's list of "inventions." He called it *Invention über eine Tonart*, an "Invention on a Key." It provides a true catharsis after Wozzeck's tragic death—or rather, a catharsis to mark Wozzeck's death as tragic—and as such is notably out of character with Büchner's tight-lipped little play. At once a "slow waltz in the lachrymose tradition of Gustav Mahler" and a "parade of leitmotives"[7] (as one critic, who rather deplored its intrusion, put it), it reaches its searing turning point at the moment shown in Ex. 9-12, where a deafening twelve-tone "aggregate sonority" suddenly gives way to an obsessively reiterated V–I bass progression in D minor, thus bringing the "invention on a key" into conformity with the obsessive-compulsive ostinato technique of the other act III inventions.

This apparently "vitalist" interlude, in which ironic distance seems all at once to vanish, has been a focus of critical controversy. Many have resisted what they have seen as the composer's despotic attempt to force the listener's sympathy. George Perle has objected to the very concept of an "invention on a key" on purely technical grounds: "It is difficult to see what distinctive features are to be inferred from this title that would differentiate the movement from any other tonal composition."[8] Noting that the other inventions are based on what Berg called "unifying principles" (pitches, chords, rhythms, etc.), Perle notes that musical forms based on such principles "may be either 'tonal' or atonal.' The 'unifying principle' implied in the term 'key,' on the other hand, belongs to another level of analytical discourse entirely."

But that is so only if the presence of a key is considered a normal (or a "default") aspect of music; and that, of course, is not the case in *Wozzeck*. The act III interlude is (by several orders of magnitude) the biggest of those "tonal" moments that impinge on the atonal world of this opera at strategic intervals like comments from beyond, or without, thus setting up the biggest, most "global" irony of all: what is normal elsewhere is abnormal here and vice versa. The "normal" language of tonality can only be spoken in *Wozzeck* as a foreign tongue. And the necessary use of so many ironic quotation marks in this paragraph shows how thoroughly inverted or "ironized" the expressive situation has become. Tonality is only available for use here "in quotes," the subject of special treatment in the form of a technical "invention" along with all those hidden "tonal" forms in the first two acts (the symphonies, the fugues, the gigues, and the gavottes) that turn out to be unrecognizable in the absence of tonality.

ex. 9-12 Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*, Act III, Entr'acte between scenes 4 and 5 ("Invention on a Key"), climax.

But as soon as we respond as "normal" listeners to the stimulus of the interlude's tonal catharsis, black and white are radically reversed. All the rest of the opera is now placed "in quotes." The distance of its special

world from the "normal" world of music becomes a part of the characterization, a metaphor for Wozzeck's crazed condition. The reason why audiences respond to *Wozzeck* "despite" its atonal language turns out to be the same as the reason why atonal music has become popular in film soundtracks as a representational device. Audiences understand it in both contexts as a metaphor for physical or psychological abnormality; it symbolizes stress, aberration, horror. It consummately conveys the terror in Wozzeck; but to summon pity the composer had to resort to an "invention on a key." In his very success with the atonal idiom, still unequaled and probably never to be surpassed, Berg exposed its limitations. There could be no greater irony, in all senses of the word. What Berg (or rather, what *Wozzeck*) seemed to be suggesting, unwelcome as the news might be even to Berg himself (to say nothing of his teacher), was that the "emancipation of dissonance" was meaningful only to composers, not to listeners, for whom (no matter at what point the line is drawn or how many harmonies are eventually accepted as "harmonious") dissonance and consonance nevertheless remained, and would always remain, a meaningful (indeed, a meaning-creating) antithesis. Reaction to this uneasy suggestion—that the all-important emancipation of dissonance might be just another of the twentieth century's utopian pipe-dreams—must inform what otherwise seems Stravinsky's insufferably snobbish remark that "what disturbs me about *Wozzeck*, a work that I love, is the level of its appeal to 'ignorant' audiences."[9]

Despite its popularity, then, or even because of it, *Wozzeck* remains a controversial work, both from the standpoint of its historical significance and because of the unresolved tensions between its surface action and its arcane structure. Berg himself was equivocal about the latter problem. In a 1928 talk about the opera he claimed that his recourse to "musical forms more or less ancient" was simply a way of differentiating the different scenes and thus maintaining interest. It was solely his business, he insisted, claiming in conclusion that

> No matter how cognizant any particular individual may be of the musical forms contained in the framework of this opera, of the precision and logic with which everything is worked out and the skill manifested in every detail, from the moment the curtain parts until it closes for the last time, there must be no one in the audience who pays any attention to the various fugues, inventions, suites, sonata movements, variations, and passacaglias—no one who heeds anything but the idea of this opera, which by far transcends the personal destiny of Wozzeck. This I believe to be my achievement.[10]

And yet the published score contradicts this assertion to the extent that "the various fugues, inventions, suites, sonata movements, variations, and passacaglias" are explicitly labeled and even analyzed, so that the reader may be properly impressed with "the precision and logic with which everything is worked out and the skill manifested in every detail." (Act I, scene 4, for example, in the Doctor's office, is the one that contains the passacaglia to which Berg makes reference: every one of its twenty-one variations is labeled for the reader.) It was probably with reference to ostentatious analytical labels like these that the American composer Roger Sessions, writing in 1933, could ridicule "an opera whose remarkable feature when heard is its fidelity to the text, its responsiveness to every changing psychological nuance," but which "proves on examination to be constructed in its various scenes on the external models of classic forms, without, however, the steady and consistent ['tonal'] movement that gives these forms their purpose and their character."

Sessions suspected "the presence of a merely speculative element" in Berg's music,

> tending to be completely dissociated from the impression actually received by the ear and the other faculties which contribute to the direct reception of a musical impression, and to produce what is either a fundamentally inessential *jeu d'esprit* [witticism] of sometimes amazing proportions, or a kind of scaffolding erected as an external substitute for a living and breathing musical line.[11]

Clearly the words of an unreconstructed vitalist, these. But as we have noted many times, it is sometimes the negative critiques that offer the best perceptions into the relationship between an artwork and its time.

While in his indignation Sessions may have exaggerated the extent to which *Wozzeck* could be reduced to a *jeu d'esprit*, he was nevertheless on to something significant about the work and about its time. Berg was fascinated by intellectual games, puzzles, ciphers, and codes of all kinds. (We have already seen an example of this predilection in his Chamber Concerto, in which the themes encode the names of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern; see Ex. 6-4.) His music is packed with riddles and hidden symbols. Some of it (like numerological symbolism) reflected Berg's personal superstitions; some of it had urgent autobiographical significance (like the coding of his initials and those of a secret lover in the music of his *Lyric Suite* for string quartet). And some of it, to be sure, was simply (merely? purely?) playful.

George Perle, who first decoded the secret love messages in the *Lyric Suite*, also came across a letter to Schoenberg in which Berg wrote out a harmonic curiosity (Ex. 9-13a) that Perle rather grandly christened the "Master Array of Interval Cycles."[12] All it amounts to is a superimposition of note-rows that proceed from a common starting point by uniform intervals of increasing size. At the bottom of the array is the chromatic scale (proceeding by minor seconds); above that is the whole-tone scale (proceeding by major seconds); above that is an arpeggiated diminished seventh chord (proceeding by minor thirds); then an arpeggiated augmented triad (proceeding by major thirds), and so on.

The array has fascinating properties indeed. Once past the initial unison, every chord formed by the superimposition is intervallically symmetrical: first a cluster of semitones, then a whole-tone aggregate, then a diminished seventh chord, then an augmented triad, and so on. And since once the tritone is passed the intervals all recur in their inverted form, the array (when pushed through twelve progressions) becomes a palindrome as well. Berg was in effect stumbling playfully on the same intersection of symmetries that (as we learned in chapter 7) was the object of Bartók's—and, later, Perle's—diligent research.

And once he'd stumbled on it, it went right into *Wozzeck* (Ex. 9-13b), and into one of the most serious scenes at that: Wozzeck's agonized confrontation with Marie in the middle of act II. One cannot say that the presence of this curiosity in any way compromises the seriousness of the scene as far as the listener is concerned; but its presence certainly does confirm Ortega's diagnosis of the modern art of the 1920s as essentially "jesting," even when serious, and therefore ironic. The very fact that Berg took delight in loading his opera with so much hidden brainy baggage — from "ancient forms" to interval arrays to number symbols and more — is an aspect of that jesting, ironic stance, and (more seriously) of the emergent divide between "research" and "communication" as composerly ideals.

ex. 9-13a Alban Berg's "master array"

ex. 9-13b Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*, Act II, scene 3, incorporation of the "master array"

The delight that the research aspect of Berg's work has afforded analysts — to the point where many studies of *Wozzeck* have completely ignored the opera's dramatic aspect and concentrated solely on its fascinating "poetics" or making—is another symptom of that irony, and that divide. Modernist music, increasingly, meant one thing to audiences, another to professionals: the "poietic" and the "esthesic" were drifting apart. Some have regarded this as a liberation, others as a tragedy. The aspect of *Wozzeck* that many find miraculous is the way in which Berg managed, particularly in act III, to yoke poietics and esthesics to a common purpose. The purposes are measurably less common in the earlier acts of the opera, and there are many later modernist works in which there is no discernable connection between the two, even works in which there seems to be no discernable esthesic component at all.

Berg never approached such an extreme. His "research" (except, perhaps, in his Chamber Concerto) never became an end in itself. But the ends to which it was the means were not only communicative. In a commentary on Berg's jeux d'esprit that was far less contentious but no less insightful than Sessions's, the

literary critic Herbert Lindenberger, who began his career with a study of Büchner, compared Berg's "form-consciousness" in *Wozzeck* to other manifestations of "classicism" in the art of the 1920s. These included Stravinsky's, of course, but also, as Lindenberger reminds us, the literary work of writers like James Joyce and T. S. Eliot.

He quotes Eliot's defense of Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, in which (as in *Wozzeck*) naturalistic content is presented within, and through, a framework of recondite technical tours de force and jeux d'esprit. That frame, in Joyce's case, was derived from Greek mythology, and in particular from Homer's *Odyssey*. Joyce, like Berg, had been accused of turning art into mere wit; but Eliot suggested that his method was "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."[13] Lindenberger very reasonably compares Joyce's method as described by Eliot to "the function of the tight musical forms which Berg employs to contain the chaotic and characteristically modern materials that he found in Büchner's play."[14] This comparison brings *Wozzeck* within the purview of another, more famous, dictum of Eliot's: "It is a function of all art to give us some perception of an order in life, by imposing an order upon it."[15] But what Eliot propounds as a universal principle, it is now easy enough to see, was more a symptom of an obsession peculiar to his time, a time when artists in all media, including many (like Schoenberg and Stravinsky) who regarded one another as esthetic antagonists with nothing at all in common, but all reeling together at the futility, the anarchy, the loss of faith, and the havoc wrought by the most needless and destructive of all wars, took refuge together in a consoling order they had purchased by a huge investment in irony.

Notes:

(6) José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art*, trans. Helene Weyl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 14–19.

(7) Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 231.

(8) George Perle, *The Operas of Alban Berg*, Vol. I: *Wozzeck* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), p. 89.

(9) Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), p. 24.

(10) Alban Berg, "A Word about *Wozzeck*" (*Das Opernproblem*, 1928); *Composers on Music*, ed. Sam Morgenstern (New York: Bonanza Books, 1956), p. 462.

(11) Roger Sessions, "Music in Crisis: Some Notes on Recent Musical History," *Modern Music* X (1932–33): 75.

(12) See George Perle, "Berg's Master Array of Interval Cycles," *Musical Quarterly* LXIII (1977): 1–30.

(13) Quoted in Herbert Lindenberger, *Georg Büchner* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), p. 129.

(14) Lindenberger, *Georg Büchner*, p. 129.

(15) T. S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama"; quoted in Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, p. 8.

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Neo-classicism

Paul Hindemith

IRONY AND SOCIAL REALITY

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

But did that consoling sense of order jibe with Berg's avowed purpose, in *Wozzeck*, of exposing a social problem? Or was it just a palliative? And what is the point of exposing a social problem if not to do something about it? Otherwise, it could again be argued (and it certainly *was* argued), the exposure amounts to no more than voyeurism, no more socially useful than the titillation Puccini's suffering heroines afforded the gawking men in the traditional opera theater. Indeed, such titillation was socially regressive, the argument went, because it was experienced (or rationalized) as pity, vice thus masquerading as virtue.

That is why Joseph Kerman, among others but especially eloquently, refused to be taken in by the famous "tonal" interlude in act III. His were the dismissive comments about it ("lachrymose waltz," "parade of leitmotives") quoted above, and he went on from there to reproach the composer for mistaking pity for self-pity, turning what might have been a call for social action into a voluptuous wallow in self-gratifying sentiment. Kerman, writing in the 1950s, was echoing a common complaint of the 1920s, when stimulating social action through art was one of the chief orders of the day, especially in the new republics of Germany and Austria, and the young Soviet Union, where political and social revolution were the chief facts of recent history.

One Soviet critic, Boris Asafyev, in a book about Stravinsky completed in 1926 and published in 1929, hailed his "neoclassical" phase not as a restoration of the past but as an awakening to contemporary reality. "Contemporary life," he wrote, "demands discipline of the will and a steady concentration of all the faculties from those who wish to be in the mainstream of work and affairs and not be left standing on the bank."[16] And so does contemporary art. In contemporary music, as Asafyev described it, responses to these demands "can be seen in the striving for severity of construction, for clarity of writing, for concentration of the greatest tension within the shortest possible time, for the attainment of the greatest expression with the most economical expenditure of performing forces."

That already sounds like Stravinsky's Octet, which for Asafyev did not mark a return to Bach but on the contrary "asserts the dynamics of life." And no matter how many stylistic allusions such music made to the preromantic "classics," those gestures were always to be read as metaphors for postromantic reality, "the impetuous current of our lives with its springy rhythms, its flying tempi, and its obedience to the pulsations of work." Moreover, Asafyev adds, such music "has not been able to escape the influences of contemporary city streets." Think of the end of Stravinsky's Octet, where Bach morphs unexpectedly but, in retrospect inevitably, into a Charleston, the dance rage of the twenties.

The legacy of romanticism, by contrast, was "hypnotic, sterile, hedonistic." It encouraged passivity, whereas for Asafyev the goal of contemporary music was to bring the virtuosity formerly expended on casting hypnotic spells "out into the world of actuality," which required a style "nearer to the street than to the salon, nearer to the life of public actuality than to that of philosophical seclusion."[17] Such a style exudes "energy, action, and actuality" rather than mere subjective "reflection," which can only lead to paralysis of the will. It is "rooted in the sensations of contemporary life and culture and not merely in personal sentiments and emotions." The reality it presents is a *social*, not an "inner," reality.

The word Asafyev keeps coming back to—"actuality" (*aktual'nost'* in Russian)—was an attempt to render an untranslatable German word, *Sachlichkeit*, of which a literal English translation might be something like "thinginess," since the German root, *Sache*, means "thing." It conveys concreteness, alertness, objectivity, sobriety, hard reality, matter-of-factness as opposed to romantic make-believe. Since 1923, when it was coined by Gustav Hartlaub, the director of a German museum, the phrase *neue Sachlichkeit* ("new actuality") had been an artistic watchword in Germany, the esthetic emblem of the fragile Weimar Republic (so called because its constitution was drafted in the East German town of Weimar in 1919) that was set up to replace the fallen German Empire with an experiment in liberal democracy. It could be taken in retrospect as a "leftist" counterpart to Ortega's "dehumanization."

Until the composer flinched in act III, *Wozzeck* might have qualified as an example of *neue Sachlichkeit*. (Its literary prototype by Büchner, although it preceded the actual concept by about a hundred years, came closer to it.) But postwar Germany did not lack for unflinching composers, who in the spirit of *neue Sachlichkeit* invented a new kind of topical opera called *Zeitoper*, another untranslatable term that might be approximated as "opera of the times," or even "now-opera." A now-opera was an opera about things right now, rather than things eternal. It was not necessarily an opera about current events; indeed, some of the most conspicuous *Zeitopern* were cast as allegories. But the composer who wrote it was acting as a citizen commentator, not a priest of art whose kingdom was not of this world, and the work was valued for its contemporary relevance, not its timeless merit. It was inevitable that *Zeitoper* and *neue Sachlichkeit*, together with the related notion of *Gebrauchsmusik* (music for use rather than contemplation), should have arisen first in postwar Germany.

If, as we have seen, World War I looms as a great divide even in the historiography of the victor nations, how much more a cataclysm did it seem to the losers, for whom it brought immediate political upheaval and economic chaos, the palpable legacy of "decadence." *Gebrauchsmusik* and *neue Sachlichkeit* were not just a reaction to romanticism, but a reaction to all the forces that were seen to have precipitated the war, forces that preeminently included nationalism. Having experienced ruin, German artists, the ostensible heirs of the "mainstream", were more suspicious than anyone else of the lie of transcendence, any promise of immortality, permanence, lasting value. Hence the cult of the perishable, the ephemeral, the transient. Hence, too, the notion of an art that was not only to be used but to be used up. Obsolescence—blithely planned obsolescence, the considered rejection of "masterpiece culture"—was the price of true contemporaneity. The chief standard bearer for all these antiromantic notions was Paul Hindemith (1895–1963), a fabulously gifted all-round musician who was an internationally acclaimed viola soloist as well as Germany's leading composer in the 1920s and 1930s. He had begun his career as the expressionist's expressionist, with a pair of scandalous one-act operas—*Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* ("Murderer, the hope of womankind", 1919), which glorified rape, and *Sancta Susanna* ("Saint Susanna", 1922) about sexual hysteria in a convent—that made him famous when they were condemned from Lutheran pulpits and banned in Frankfurt. These operas maintained prewar "maximalist" styles (the first "post-Strauss," the second "post-Debussy"). Another early opera, however, *Das Nusch-Nuschi* (1921), showed signs of postwar irreverence for high artistic values, holding up to ridicule one of the sublimest moments in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. It, too, caused a scandal.

The planned-obsolescence factor first showed itself in Hindemith's instrumental music. The last movement of his *Kammermusik Nr. 1* (Chamber Music No. 1, actually a sort of symphony for chamber orchestra) was titled "Finale: 1921" and quoted a foxtrot popularized that year by a German dance band. The next year's model, the *Suite "1922"* for piano, sported a "Shimmy" and a "Boston," American dances similar to the Charleston. The composer's own title-page cartoon (Fig. 9-3) shows a chance moment on a bustling thoroughfare (compare Asafyev's emphasis on "the street" as inspiration).
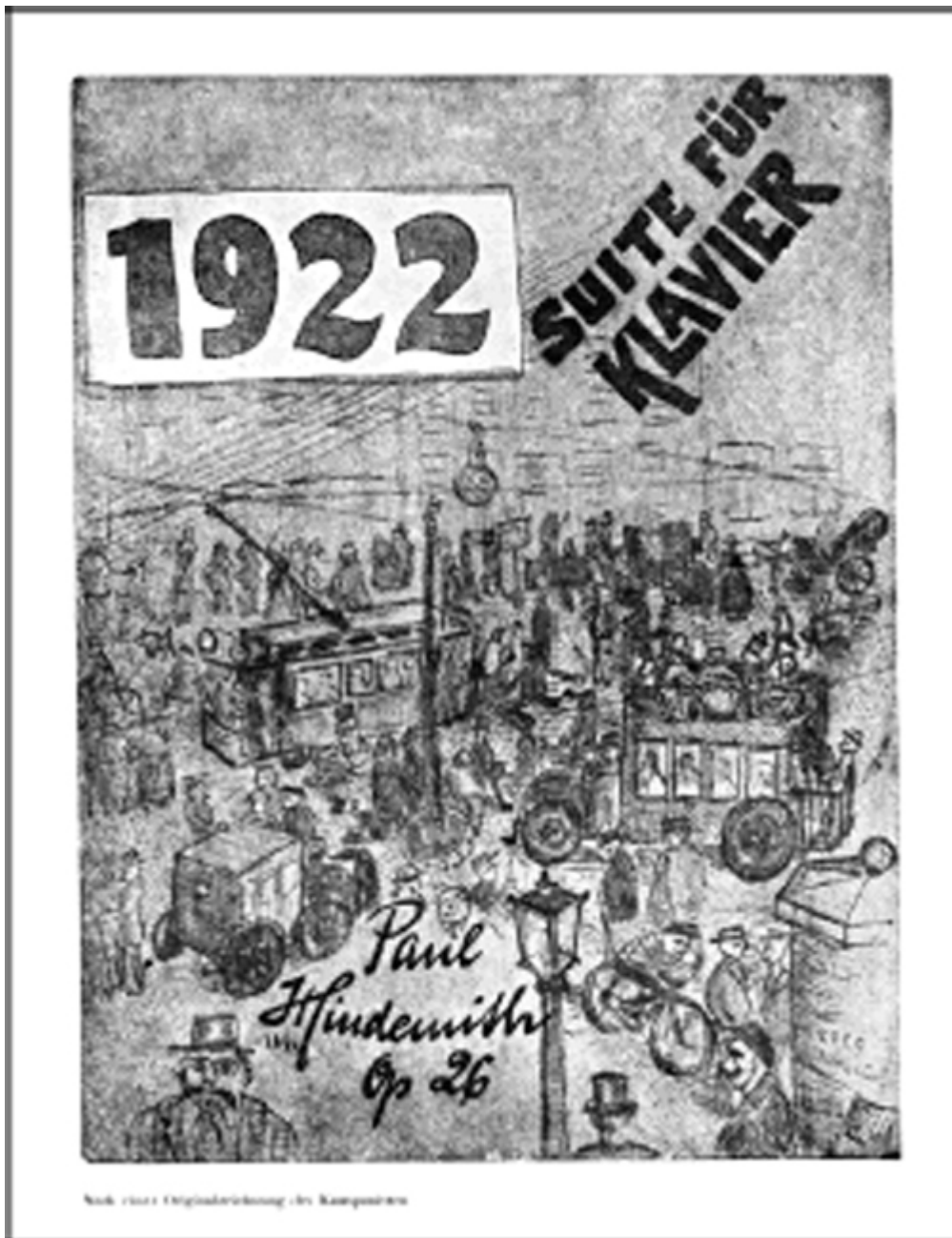
fig. 9-3 Title page of Hindemith's *Suite "1922."*

Urbane antimetaphysics of another sort was embodied in the music Hindemith wrote for himself to perform, epitomized in another product of 1922, the Sonata for solo viola, op. 25, no. 1. This was *Spielmusik* ("player's music"), unadulterated by any higher purpose than...well, than spieling it. The activity of performing it was its content. (Again compare Asafyev's emphasis on "energy, action, actuality.") "I composed the first and fifth movements in a buffet car between Frankfurt and Cologne and then went straight on to the platform and played the sonata,"[18] the notoriously prolific Hindemith boasted in a footnote to his enormous catalogue of works. That was turning matter-of-factness into a high artistic principle, and so was Hindemith's zeal to insulate his music from "tiresome rubato-playing and 'expression'-art"[19] by the use of sloganeering performance directions. The fourth movement of the solo viola sonata (Ex. 9-14), set at a palpably unplayable tempo of = 600 – 640, carries the rubric "Frantic tempo. Boisterous. Beauty of tone is unimportant."

ex. 9-14 Paul Hindemith, Sonata for solo viola, Op. 25, no. 1, IV

Notes:

(16) Boris Asafiev, *A Book about Stravinsky*, trans. Richard F. French (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), p. 97.

(17) Asafiev, *A Book about Stravinsky*, p. 99.

(18) Quoted in Stephen Hinton, *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik: A Study of Musical Aesthetics in the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) with Particular Reference to the Works of Paul Hindemith* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1988), p. 181.

(19) Quoted in Hinton, *The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik*, p. 186.

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Zeitoper

Ernst Krenek

"AMERICANISM" AND MEDIA TECHNOLOGY

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The *Zeitoper*, where all of these Weimarish notions intersected and reached their peak, was ushered in, on 10 February 1927, by *Jonny spielt auf* ("Johnny goes to town"). The hit of the decade, if not the century, it made its composer, Ernst Krenek (1900–91), a precocious Czech-born citizen of Austria who had already written four operas, a European celebrity at twenty-six, and financially independent for the rest of his long life. During the next season, 1927–28, *Jonny* had forty-five productions and 421 performances as far west as Antwerp and as far east as Lemberg (now L'viv in Ukraine). By 1929 it had been performed on three continents, and its libretto had been translated into fourteen languages. "Now-opera" deserved its name: it had a prominence in the cultural life of its time matched only by the French and Italian grand operas of the nineteenth century and never equaled since, for opera soon lost its status as mass entertainment. (Krenek went on to write sixteen more operas, of which only one had more than a single production.)

The title character, a Negro jazz musician who wins the girl from a dreamy postromantic German composer and steals a magic life-giving violin from a glamorous virtuoso who perishes under the wheels of a boat-train headed for America, was an obvious allegory of the New World's triumph over the old in the wake of the exhausting war. Its "Americanism" was essentially a call to "lighten up" and live in the present. Many European conservatives were more sensitive to its implied endorsement of racial miscegenation, taking the opera as yet another symptom of what the pessimistic historian Oswald Spengler, in the title of his 1922 best-seller, called *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* ("The decline of the west"). Its lean, mean textures and speedy, angular music, alert and twitching with new-world rhythms, were a threat to all traditional Germanic values of "inwardness" and "depth." Its emblematic sound is that of mechanically reproduced music (an American invention): onstage record players and radios blaring the "American" dance music associated with the title character. One of the opera's main leitmotifs is a shimmy (Krenek wrongly labeled it a "Blues") called *Leb' wohl, mein Schatz*—roughly, "Bye-bye, baby"—played in breakneck fashion by the orchestra at what Krenek calls a *schnelles Grammophon-Tempo* (quick record-player tempo), leaving absolutely no time for subjective reflection (Ex. 9-15).

ex. 9-15 Ernst Krenek, *Jonny spielt auf*, "Leb' wohl, mein Schatz"

An even more ironic clash between the "classical" form of a *Zeitoper* and its ephemeral content pervades Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage* of 1929. The title, literally "News of the Day," is what newsboys shouted on German city streets; the English equivalent would be "Read all about it!" or "Extra! Extra!" Its subject, however, is not the news of any particular day, but the idea of contemporary celebrity, sensation-mongering, publicity, and instant comment—an idea that has only grown more timely as the news media have grown ever quicker and more ubiquitous. A divorcing couple, Eduard and Laura, attract the attention of the press, which follows them everywhere, even into the bathroom. (Act II begins with the presumably naked Laura in an onstage bathtub, singing an aria about the modern miracle of indoor plumbing.) Laura and Eduard hire publicity managers and restage their quarrel nightly for the benefit of a gawking public. In the process they fall in love again, but the public insists on its own satisfaction and they must divorce as promised. The coloratura bathtub aria (Ex. 9-16) is a good example of Hindemith's brand of musical satire, in which traditional operatic forms are held up in a kind of mutually ridiculing tandem with the shallow stuff that passes for contemporary news in an age of burgeoning media.

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MUSIC FOR POLITICAL ACTION

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

ex. 9-16 Paul Hindemith, *Neues vom Tage*, Bathtub Aria

The result is a kind of panorama of contemporary mores, mocking to be sure but not indignant: the opera colludes with the butts of its own satire, affording its own public the kind of titillation the libretto ostensibly condemns, and ensuring a good (yes, and lucrative) reception. Was that hypocrisy or just good fun? Here the consternation came not just from the right, as with *Jonny spielt auf*, but from the left as well. For in Weimar Germany there were many who felt that the newly detached and ironic brand of art that went by the name of *neue Sachlichkeit*, well suited as it was to social comment, had to justify its existence by virtue of a worthy social purpose, and that meant more than fun.

"I have just played you some music by Wagner and his followers," wrote Kurt Weill (1900–50), another composer of *Zeitopern*, in a newspaper article published on Christmas Day, 1928, and cast as an imaginary conversation with schoolchildren:

fig. 9-4 Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya at Brook House, 1942.

You saw that it had so many notes in it that I couldn't play them all. You tried to sing along with the melody but that didn't work. You felt that the music was making you sleepy, or even a bit drunk, affecting you like alcohol or some other drug. But you didn't want to go to sleep. You wanted to hear music that you could understand without explanation, that you could really absorb, and with tunes that you could quickly learn. Apparently you do not know that your parents still go to concerts sometimes. This is a custom that comes from the last century, arising out of social conditions that are no longer relevant to your generation. There are again today great issues that are of concern to everyone, and if music cannot be placed in the service of the general public then it has lost its reason for being.

Write this down! Music is no longer something for the few.[20]

Claiming to have "started from scratch" in an effort to adapt opera to these contemporary demands, Weill

names the collaborator with whom he has joined forces, a man already famous for theatrical reform: Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), who is often named together with Meyerhold and Pirandello as one of the great destroyers of theatrical illusion. Unlike the others, Brecht had an overtly political purpose, to which Weill also subscribed. The "service to the general public" of which Weill spoke was, in his and Brecht's view, public political education or indoctrination as a stimulus to revolutionary political action. To achieve this purpose, music had not only to change its style, renouncing the paralyzing emotional "hypnosis" that Wagner had practiced so well, but also its function within the drama.

Brecht called his theatrical style "epic theater." In place of an illusion of real action, epic theater incorporated narrative, montage (scenes played in counterpoint from various separately lighted areas of the stage), and direct exhortation of the audience in defiance of the fourth wall. Sets and lighting were deliberately nonrealistic, and Brecht even allowed the staging process—the work of stagehands, the moving of props, the backstage assembly areas—to be visible to the audience. The purpose of all of this was frankly didactic: Brecht and his collaborators wanted to engage the audience's fully conscious critical faculties and rationally argue a persuasive political case. That way the audience would not be rendered passive, like a hypnotized subject, attentive only to its own feelings, but rather active, engaged with social problems, and motivated to alleviate them. The urgent purpose of the contemporary theater, these artists felt, was to break the "music trance" associated with romanticism.

The effect of witnessing the stage machinery in action made the artificiality of the drama evident to the spectators, and enabled them to retain their critical faculties. Indeed, seeing how artificial the theater was produced an effect Brecht called *Verfremdung*. It is usually translated as "alienation" or "defamiliarization," but all it really means is that the epic theater makes its action and workings as "strange" (*fremd*) as possible, allowing the audience a distanced perspective that enables them to keep the play and its message distinct, so that they will leave the theater pondering not the former but the latter. Making things look in the theater the way they look in life—that is, familiar—encourages us to take them for granted, to pay them no real attention. (We all know what familiarity breeds.) Making them strange, putting them at an unaccustomed distance, makes us (as Ortega also taught) newly observant and newly impressionable.

It would be no distortion of Brecht's purpose, and no insult to his integrity, to say that his epic theater was an instrument of political propaganda, and that therein lay its justification. "Once the content becomes, technically speaking, an independent component, to which text, music and setting 'adopt attitudes,'" Brecht wrote,

> once illusion is sacrificed to free discussion, and once the spectator, instead of being enabled to have an experience, is forced as it were to cast his vote; then a change has been launched which goes far beyond formal matters and begins for the first time to affect the theater's social function.[21]

The role of music in the epic theater, according to Weill, was similar to that of the newly noticeable stagecraft. Refuting a hundred years of operatic theorizing, or at least turning his back on it, Weill declared that "music cannot further the action of a play or create its background." So much for Verdi, so much for Wagner, so much for all who have sought to make the music of an opera a continuous and flexible ambience for dramatic action or a subliminal intensifier of feeling. Instead, Weill contended, music "achieves its proper value when it interrupts the action at the right moments," in order (as Brecht would say) to adopt an attitude toward the action and influence the spectator's response to it.

The musical interruption thus serves as a jolt, to puncture whatever illusion of reality remains and reengage the full, wide-awake attention of the audience, all the better to monger the message of the play. The musical numbers that accomplish this—Weill liked to call them "songs," borrowing from English (but pronounced "*zonks*" in German)—serve the same purpose that the casting of rules or teachings in rhythm and rhyme had served since time immemorial. The music makes the message memorable. But to be memorable, music must be simple and direct. In practice, this meant imitating the form, and to some extent the style, of popular music.

Weill called this jolt or interruption-effect, borrowing from the Latin, a musical *Gestus*, a word combining the idea of "gesture" with that of "deed." The proper function of music in the theater he called its "gestic character"[22] (*der gestische Charakter der Musik*). He illustrated it in his newspaper talk by suddenly interrupting it and ordering the imaginary class of schoolchildren to "sing No. 16" (Ex. 9-17):

ex. 9-17 Kurt Weill, "No. 16"

And what is this singsong "No. 16?" Weill playfully refrains from identifying it, so that in the context of the article it seems as if he were calling on a congregation to sing out of a hymnal. But most of his readers would have recognized it as one of the numbers from his big hit of the previous summer, *Die Dreigroschenoper* ("The threepenny opera"), even if they didn't know that it happened to be "No. 16" in the printed score. The tune gives a fair idea of the level of simplicity at which Weill aimed, and the words ("Man lives by his wits, but off a head like yours a louse at best could live") give the flavor of the "gestic" interruptions—cynical, even insulting sermonettes about social injustice and the audience's complacent complicity in it. (For the "schoolchildren" he was addressing in the newspaper piece, Weill softened "louse" to "mouse.")

A play in dialogue with musical numbers, *Die Dreigroschenoper* was the second show Weill had produced in collaboration with Brecht. Like *Jonny spielt auf*, it was one of the legendary box-office sensations of the Weimar Republic, with over three hundred performances in a single Berlin theater during the first year of its run. By 1933, the publisher had licensed a total of 133 productions worldwide. Such a play would have been called a Singspiel in the eighteenth century. To that extent, it was an ironized return to an outmoded or preromantic genre like so much of the art of the 1920s. It even had a specific eighteenth-century model, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) by the English playwright John Gay, a satirical "ballad opera" about London low-life in which the music had consisted of harmonized popular tunes. (Weill quoted one of them for effect, but otherwise wrote a new and original score.) The clever subtitle Weill and Brecht came up with, *Songspiel*, captured both its "classical" resonances and its contemporary relevance. In the original production, the "antioperatic" thrust was maintained by casting cabaret singers and dramatic actors who could more or less carry a tune in the singing roles, rather than operatically trained voices. (One of the actresses was Weill's wife, Lotte Lenya, who supervised a famous New York revival in translation, which ran for 2,611 performances in the mid-1950s.) The original "pit orchestra" consisted of seven cabaret musicians "doubling" on a total of twenty-three instruments. The "gestus" or interruption-effect of the music was enhanced by radically changing the lighting for each song, displaying its title on a screen, and keeping the instrumentalists visible to the audience at all times.

fig. 9-5 Brecht and Weill, _Die Dreigroschenoper_ (Oldenburg, 1929): Maria Martinsen as Jenny.

Die Dreigroschenoper **makes a fascinating comparison with** _Wozzeck_**, since both operas had as their stated aim the exposure of a social problem—namely, society's hypocritically "criminalizing" mistreatment of the poor. But where** _Wozzeck_ **adopted a conventional attitude of pity toward its subject, allowed its audience a satisfying (or self-satisfying) catharsis that left it feeling virtuously compassionate, and clothed the drama in a prodigally—even ostentatiously—inventive musical fabric,** _Die Dreigroschenoper_ **maintains a tone of unmitigated anger and sarcasm, challenging its audience's presumption of moral superiority and indicting its complacency, while using music that (as Weill proudly demonstrated in his newspaper article) rejected the advanced musical techniques and idioms of the day as ostentatiously as Berg had embraced them.**

The act II finale, which carries the title 'Ballade über die Frage: 'Wovon lebt der Mensch?" ("Ballad about the question, What keeps a man alive?") makes the comparison with _Wozzeck_ **particularly pointed, since it deals explicitly with the plight of "arme Leute" (poor folk), the quintessential Wozzeckian theme. Where the title**

character of Berg's opera, though he ends a criminal, is presented as a good man more sinned against than sinning, the main character of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Macheath (alias Mac the Knife), is the head of a gang of street robbers—a confirmed and dedicated (indeed a professional) felon.

In Gay's opera Macheath's frank villainy is used as a witty foil to expose the hypocritical villainy of polite society. No better way is proposed, and the satire (like most eighteenth-century satire) is of the mildest, friendliest sort. In Brecht's adaptation, Macheath's villainy is decried as the inevitable result of social injustice. It is not humorously endorsed after Gay's fashion, but neither is it sanctimoniously condemned. The message of the play, which Weill's music intervenes to underscore, is that villainy must be eradicated humanely, not by zealous self-righteous punishment, but by attacking its root cause, poverty.

The final ballad in act II takes place just after Macheath has escaped from prison. He had been fingered by a group of whores whom he has continued to patronize although married (to two women at once, it later turns out), and who have been bribed to betray him by one of his fathers-in-law not for any reason of justice but merely so that his daughter can come back home and go on working for her father without pay. The ballad (Ex. 9-18), sung by Macheath together with one of the whores who has turned him in (and who will turn around in the next act and betray him again, for money), describes the dog-eat-dog reality the "arme Leute" must confront, a world in which the idle moralizing of the well-fed has no place.

It is sung in front of the curtain, directly to the audience. Not only does this breach the fourth wall, it amounts to a stepping out of character, as Brecht often prescribed: "the actor must not only sing," he wrote, "but show a man singing."[23] The audience no longer feels it is watching the antics of fictional characters, but rather that it is seeing and hearing two singing actors for whom Brecht and Weill have written a harangue with no other purpose than to defy the audience's right to pass a moral judgment on the action it has observed: "For even honest folk [yes, you!] will act like sinners/Unless they've had their customary dinners!" (as translated for the New York production by the American composer Marc Blitzstein).

Notes:

(20) "Der Musiker Weill," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 25 December 1928, as translated in *The Musical Times* 70 (1 March 1929): 224.

(21) *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. and ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 39.

(22) Cf. Weill, "Über den gestischen Charakter der Musik," *Die Musik* 21 (March 1929), 419–23; translated in Kim H. Kowalke, *Kurt Weill in Europe* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), pp. 491–96.

(23) *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 44–45; quoted in W. Anthony Sheppard, *Revealing Masks: Exotic Influences and Ritualized Performance in Modernist Music Theater* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 88.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Kurt Weill

Die Dreigroschenoper

Ferruccio Busoni

RIGHTEOUS RENUNCIATION, OR WHAT?

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

ex. 9-18 Kurt Weill, *Die Dreigroschenoper***, "Zweites Dreigroschenfinale," mm. 18-31**

It is obvious, of course, that the music to which this sardonic number is set, despite Weill's avowals in the newspaper, is not music for twelve-year-olds. It is the work of a sophisticated and highly trained professional, one who had all the technique it would have taken to compose another *Wozzeck*, and in fact one who at first seemed headed in exactly that direction. The son of a well-known synagogue cantor, Weill was a composing prodigy and was given a training of the most elite caliber. At eighteen he enrolled in Engelbert Humperdinck's composition class at the Berlin Conservatory. Two years later, he was accepted into a master class for young composers that was created for Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924), then the most sought-after composition teacher in Europe, at the Prussian Academy of Arts. He worked with Busoni for three years, absorbing his teacher's ideas about what he called *junge Klassizität* ("young classicism" as antidote to "decadence"), but he was also attracted to the music and teaching of Schoenberg, who reciprocated his esteem to the extent of nominating him for a government stipend.

Weill's early works included a symphony (1921), two string quartets (1919, 1923), a violin concerto (1924, scored like Stravinsky's piano concerto for a wind orchestra), and most characteristically, a *Sinfonia Sacra* (1922) whose three neobaroque movements (Fantasia, Passacaglia, Hymnus) reflected Busoni's neoclassical teachings most directly. The musical style that Weill employed, however, was very far from that of the early "neoclassicists," resembling instead the "pantonal" style of Schoenberg's expressionist phase. His first opera, *Der Protagonist (1924)* had a libretto by Georg Kaiser, then Germany's leading expressionist playwright, and

cemented his early alliance with the Viennese atonalists. The composer with whom the young Weill was most frequently compared, in fact, was Berg.

So the style of *Die Dreigroschenoper* was the result of a deliberate, radical, and very controversial renunciation. Was it a sacrifice to social conscience, or just a commercial sell-out? The work professes the former in no uncertain terms, but its great commercial success suggested the latter to many, especially artists who maintained a traditional commitment to "disinterested" romantic values. Schoenberg, the most adamant of them all, refused even to recognize a distinction between social commitment and commercial compromise, accusing Hindemith, Krenek, and Weill equally of "a lack of conscience" and "a disturbing lack of responsibility."[24] The artist's primary obligation, under romanticism, was not to other people but to art. A social conscience was therefore no conscience at all. Indeed, lack of a proper contempt for the world and its inhabitants was contemptible. The greatest sin of *neue Sachlichkeit*, in Schoenberg's eyes, was its esthetic "nonchalance." Yet even if we decide not to hold his success against the composer, concluding that results do not necessarily reflect on motives and granting Weill and Brecht the benefit of every doubt, a dilemma remains. Can an art dedicated to shocking the middle-class public out of its complacency be said to have succeeded when that very public consumes it with delight? Brecht himself, sensitive both to this point and to the possibility that Weill's contribution was upstaging his own, eventually belittled the music in *Die Dreigroschenoper* and claimed to prefer a revised version in which the actors would improvise minimal melodies of their own: he called this better style of didactic theater music "Misuk" (pronounced mee-ZOOK) as opposed to "Musik" (moo-ZEEK), the normal German word for music, which for him denoted something merely "culinary"[25] —that is, sensuously appealing rather than instructive.

There was no chance of revising *Die Dreigroschenoper* in this way; not only were audiences unlikely to accept it, but Weill's contribution was legally protected, even from Brecht. And yet Weill, too, faced a problem posed by the popularity of his art and the political compromise that implied. Was there a politically effective alternative? If his art were to maintain a "difficult" stylistic exterior, as critics faithful to Schoenberg (like Adorno) insisted that art must do if it was to communicate a difficult social message, but that difficulty dissuaded its potential audience to the point where no one was listening, then has it succeeded any better? Can "serious" art ever be an effective medium for political propaganda or a spur to social action? Or is it doomed by its very nature to be either an esthetic plaything or, worse, an instrument for the maintenance of social hierarchies?

No one could possibly claim now that *Die Dreigroschenoper*, a proven audience favorite thanks to its catchy music, has been an instrument for social change. But Weill and Brecht also experimented with more modest works in a less flamboyantly entertaining style, with a sterner sense of utility (*Gebrauch*), and with unsentimental messages that were at times truly unpalatable by ordinary theatrical standards. Among these more ascetic products of their collaboration were what Brecht called *Lehrstücke* (didactic pieces or "lessons") and *Schulopern* ("school operas").

A *Lehrstück* was a work meant for amateur performance that would discipline the political attitudes of the participants along with their performance skills, and also furnish the eventual spectators with moral and political instruction. The first of them, *Der Lindberghflug* ("Lindbergh's flight", 1929), was produced by Brecht in collaboration with both Weill and Hindemith. (Later Weill reset it alone as a cantata for professional performance.) It was meant, and was probably the first musical work to be meant, primarily for radio performance, making extensive use of sound effects (propellers, wind, murmuring waves, cheering crowds) that depended for their effect on the invisibility of their source.

The work was a determined attempt to divest Lindbergh's famous solo transatlantic flight of its heroic aura—or rather its aura of heroic individualism. Lindbergh (tenor) introduces himself in an aria that could serve as a textbook illustration of *neue Sachlichkeit* matter-of-factness: he gives his name, his age, his nationality, and a list of the equipment he is carrying. The baritone soloist, a "listener" to broadcast flight news, was directed to render his part mechanically, "without identifying his own feelings with those contained in the text, pausing at the end of each line; in other words, in the spirit of an *exercise*." The emphasis was taken away from the man and placed on the event as a scientific or technological breakthrough that depended on many besides the flyer himself. (Indeed, Lindbergh—who had compromised himself on the

eve of World War II by expressing admiration for the Nazi regime—actually disappeared from a revised version of the *Lehrstück* that Brecht prepared in 1950 under the title *Der Ozeanflug*, "The ocean flight.")

Notes:

(24) Arnold Schoenberg, "Linear Counterpoint" (1931); *Style and Idea*, p. 294.

(25) Brecht, "Über die Verwendung von Musik für ein episches Theater"; *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 89.

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Paul Hindemith

Hanns Eisler

Kurt Weill

Der Jasager

NEW-MORALITY PLAYS

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Together with Hindemith alone, Brecht produced another *Lehrstück* that was first performed under that name alone in 1929 at a new music festival near the German resort town of Baden, but was later published as *Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis*, "The Baden lesson on acquiescence." It embodies an even more stringent version of the lesson contained in the Lindbergh piece. It is also about a flyer, an unnamed pilot who is injured in a crash. He appeals for help but is persuaded by the chorus that he does not deserve it; rather he is taught to acknowledge the insignificance of his own life within the social scheme, and to accept death.

In *Die Massnahme* ("The measure taken," 1930), a *Lehrstück* written in collaboration with the Communist composer Hanns Eisler (1898–1962), this message is magnified startlingly. A "young comrade," who has responded to a moral dilemma as a feeling individual rather than in accord with Party doctrine, is killed for the good of the cause—but only after his "assent" is demanded and given. Part of what makes *Die Massnahme* so startling to recall is our present awareness of the similarity between the measures it advocates hypothetically and those actually taken several years later at the notorious Moscow "show trials," where many old revolutionaries were forced or (worse) persuaded to confess to capital offenses of which they were in fact innocent. Its text often resorts to straight political exhortation—"Agitprop" or agitational propaganda, as it was called in Communist circles—drawn in part from the writings of social and civic activists including Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state.

Eisler's settings of these texts, for "workers' chorus," were in a rigorously simplified style, mainly unison singing or two-part harmony accompanied by brass and percussion (and piano, whenever the bourgeoisie needed to be mocked). Songs like these, meant in the first place to give the singers a sense of political solidarity, were called "mass songs" (*Massenlieder*) or "battle songs" (*Kampflieder*). At particularly forceful moments, the chorus left off singing altogether and shouted in rhythmic unison. At the first performance, after-hours at one of Berlin's largest concert halls, the composer, who might have conducted, instead practiced what he preached, standing among the choristers in a gesture of working-class solidarity. The title phrase in "Change the World: It Needs It" (*Ändere die Welt, sie braucht es*, Ex. 9-19), with words by Brecht, became a famous Communist slogan in its own right. The text justifies violence in a good cause. The distinctive style of the setting stems from a prevalence of tritones, evidence of the composer's familiarity with the modern music of his day.

ex. 9-19 Hanns Eisler, *Die Massnahme*, "Ändere die Welt, sie braucht es," mm. 19-38

Nevertheless, *Die Massnahme*, submitted for performance at a Berlin New Music Festival, was rejected by a screening committee, of which Hindemith was a member, on grounds of "artistic mediocrity." Yet its perpetrator had renounced a training every bit as elite and prestigious as Weill's, and far more so than Hindemith's. Eisler had been a pupil of Schoenberg, no less, who had once named the political renegade-to-be, together with Webern and Berg, as "the most talented young composers, with the best preparation, whom I have taught." Unlike Weill's, Eisler's idealism was never questioned; he never had a popular hit, and never sought one. Even Weill came, eventually, to despise him—but that is not a story for this chapter.

Possibly the most stylistically significant *Lehrstück* or *Schuloper* (the collaborators used the terms interchangeably) was *Der Jasager* ("The yea-sayer," or "He who says yes," 1930), which Weill and Brecht wrote for performance by schoolchildren, plus a single adult performer—the Teacher, to emphasize even further the didactic nature of the piece. Its first performance was given under prestigious government sponsorship, underwritten by Berlin's Central Institute for Education and Instruction and acted by the pupils of the Berlin Academy of Church and School Music: this was the closest to official recognition that the idea of modernist, ostensibly left-wing *Gebrauchsmusik* ever achieved in Weimar Germany. Thereafter, the little school opera had almost as many productions in its modest domain as *Die Dreigroschenoper* had on Germany's glamour stages. Adopted by the German Ministry of Education as a curricular offering, it was produced in more than three hundred German schools by 1932.

Like the plot of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, the plot of *Der Jasager* was borrowed from an archaic source, in this case an exotic one as well: a fifteenth-century Japanese Noh play (or ceremonial drama) that tells of a boy who, to obtain medicine for his sick mother, accompanies a group of students over a dangerous mountain pass, but falling ill, bows to custom and allows himself to be hurled into the valley so as not to stay the progress of the group. Like the original *Lehrstück*, and like *Die Massnahme* (if not so blatantly topical as these), it is another study in "Einverständnis" or acquiescence for the sake of the common good, didactically proclaimed by the chorus that both opens and closes the show (Ex. 9-20a).

ex. 9-20a Kurt Weill, *Der Jasager*, no. 1 (chorus)

Unlike the brazen score of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, with its flashy gestures toward contemporary popular music, and unlike Eisler's raucous *Massenlieder*, Weill's music for *Der Jasager* is quietly serious and almost ascetically spare. In this it seems to be vying with the "stripped down" or denuded style—the *style dépouillé*—that French critics were hailing in the "neoclassical" works of Stravinsky. But where Stravinsky's asceticism was an asceticism of chic, and an explicit rejection of "content," Weill's asceticism served the needs of the grave and semiritualistic text—the overriding *Gebrauch* or use-value to which his art was subservient.

In an essay on *Der Jasager* that he published in a Berlin arts magazine, Weill came close (almost as close as Stravinsky or Schoenberg, to say nothing of Brecht) to asserting his ideas prescriptively, as an obligation on all composers. He glossed the term *Schuloper* in three ways: first, as a school for composers of opera, teaching them a new foundation for musical theater; second, as a schooling for performers, teaching them "simplicity and naturalness"[26]; and third, as instruction on how art may be placed at the service of social institutions, rather than being a selfish end in itself. Only then did he take up the matter of the play's moral teaching and the way in which the music enhanced its persuasiveness.

The climactic scene, in which the boy does the thing for which he is named (Ex. 9-20b), is a study in purposeful restraint: climax by vast understatement. Rarely have so few notes been called upon to do more expressive work. The expression, moreover, however histrionically it is curbed, is of the traditional "romantic" type. Although one of the reasons for restraint was the *neue Sachlichkeit* precept that persuasion must be rational rather than emotional and acquiescence freely considered rather than coerced, the very presence of music says and does otherwise. Stephen Hinton, a historian of "Weimar" musical culture, has pointed out that the chorus that narrates and reflects upon the child's sacrificial death modulates to the traditional lamenting key of D minor, the very key on which Berg wrote his cathartic "invention" at the climax of *Wozzeck*, and that in this radically stripped-down context, its stark dissonances carry a payload of "immense human grief."[27] What the music seems to convey is less a celebration of submission to the demands of a collective or corporate body than a resigned recognition that such a sacrifice is sometimes necessary, and that one must be taught to know when that is the case.

ex. 9-20b Kurt Weill, *Der Jasager*, no. 10 (concluding scene)

Ultimately, Weill's and Brecht's own attitudes are less important historically than the controversy to which *Der Jasager* gave rise. Once it had left its creators' hands, it led an unpredictable life of its own in the

clamorous and unruly political atmosphere of Weimar Germany. Precisely because it had been given an official sanction by a government ministry, the play became the object of furious contention, not all of it to Weill's or Brecht's liking. Conservative Christian writers, and even some on the fascist extreme, praised the play for its moral authoritarianism, and some leftist critics objected to the ease with which it could be given a rightist twist. (And maybe that tells us something about the nature of totalitarian thinking.) It often happened, too, that the schoolchildren engaged in performing the piece objected to the ending.

In theory, open discussion and critique were just what *Lehrstücke* like *Der Jasager* were supposed to provoke. In fact, Brecht revised the text to make it more palatable, and to prevent the sacrifice from being interpreted as favoring the wrong cause. In the first revision, the boy was portrayed as seeking medicine not just for his own mother, but for his whole village, which would suffer if the expedition were delayed on his account; and he asks to be killed in part because he fears being left alone. These changes lessened the chances that his acquiescence might be viewed as unjust.

The second revision, much more radical, produced a sort of counterplay called *Der Neinsager* ("He who says no"). This time the boy refuses to be sacrificed, and the group turns back. His apparent selfishness is mitigated by leaving out the part about the medicine, leaving in its stead only an irrational "Great Custom" that travelers who fall ill must die. The new message, that "great customs" should not be blindly followed, as bourgeois traditionalists might urge, but rather subjected to rational critique, could also serve revolutionary purposes. There was an additional point as well, emphasized by Hinton, who writes that by the early 1930s, the threat of fascism—a political reality in which "nay-sayers would not be tolerated"[28] —was sufficiently real to motivate a play that would advocate their protection. Brecht actually imagined performances of *Der Jasager* and *Der Neinsager* on the same bill, but Weill never wrote a setting for the latter.

Notes:

(26) Weill, "Über meine Schuloper *Der Jasager*" (1930); Kowalke, *Kurt Weill in Europe*, p. 530.

(27) Stephen Hinton, "Jasager, Der," in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. II (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 885.

(28) *Ibid.*

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Film and the History of Opera

THE DEATH OF OPERA?

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

These debates are worth pondering in detail, not so much for the sake of the issues they raised in their day, but simply as an indication of how seriously artworks were both meant and taken as political expressions in Weimar Germany. The vigor with which *Der Jasager* was discussed, and the frequency with which it was performed, are evidence in turn of a larger historical situation that now seems far more deserving of comment than it could possibly have seemed at the time. The operas and musical plays discussed in this chapter—by Prokofieff, by Berg, by Krenek, by Hindemith, and by Weill—were successful and popular in a way that almost no opera has been since 1933. For the thriving operatic economy of the Weimar Republic was the last truly thriving—that is, consumption-driven—economy in the history of opera.

These composers wrote for a ready market. Their work was in demand. They strove not for eventual immortality but for immediate success. Ephemerality, not immortality, was the order of the day. Sudden eclipse was actually part of the bargain. An opera had its place in the sun if it managed to earn one, and then it moved out of the way. Evanescence was not just the price of a booming operatic economy, it was also the proof; it implied a constant interest in the new. Producers could recoup their investment in new works and sometimes make hefty profits, and so they sought out new works to produce. Premieres were more noteworthy than revivals, and commanded the lively interest of the press.

But all of this came to an end in 1933, when the Nazi regime took power in Germany, and it has never been restored anywhere. In this chapter, that means, we have in effect witnessed the end of opera as a major contemporary genre. There will be operas to discuss in later chapters (and even a couple of important composers who specialized in the genre), but they will be few and far between, and almost none of them will have performance statistics to match any of the ones discussed in this chapter.

So what happened?

Most obviously and proximately, the Great Depression, the economic slump that began with the New York stock market crash in October 1929, and over the next few years encompassed the globe. Beginning in 1931, many theaters in Germany had to close, and even in the theaters that hung on impresarios had to flee the copyrighted contemporary repertory, where expensive royalties had to be paid, and seek refuge in the cheaper public domain. But whereas the spoken theater eventually regained and surpassed its previous artistic and economic levels, contemporary operatic culture was effectively killed, and not only in Germany but worldwide. What killed it?

"Talkies," which were really singies, with or without songs. The movies did not only preempt the operatic audience. At a profound level, the movies became the operas of the mid- to late-twentieth century, leaving the actual opera houses with a closed-off museum repertoire, to which new additions have been exceedingly few, and with a specialized audience of aficionados—"opera buffs," "canary fanciers"—rather than a general entertainment public hungry for sensation. With the advent of the sound film, opera found its preeminence as a union of the arts compromised, and its standing as the grandest of all spectacles usurped.

The kinds of subjects that had been opera's chief preserve—myth and epic, historical costume drama, romance, fast-paced farce—suited the new medium even better. Actors and actresses on film were literally,

not just metaphorically, larger than life. The mythic aura of the diva attached itself irrecoverably to them. Cinematic transport to distant times and climes was instantaneous. Evocative atmosphere, exotic or realistic, could be more potently conjured up on film than on the best-equipped operatic stage, and the narrative techniques of the movies were unprecedentedly flexible and compelling. Film, in short, could keep the promise of romanticism, and preserve its flame more effectively than opera, the romantic art par excellence, especially after opera had been invaded by *neue Sachlichkeit.*

To the extent that music gave opera a reason for being by enhancing scale, magnifying characters, providing imaginative transport and "framing" devices that went beyond those of the spoken theater, it now found itself trumped in turn. As to music's hitherto unique powers as a delineator or inducer of moods, as emotional catharsis, as sheer sensuous presence, it turned out that a movie soundtrack could be remarkably like an opera in its function, if not precisely in its means. Both sound-film and opera have the effect of surrounding an action in a metaphorical sonic ambience that represents and objectifies feeling. Like operatic characters, cinematic characters do not hear, as characters, the sounds that attend their behavior. They live in the sounds and through them. When music is actually performed in the course of the action, which happens in almost every opera and every film, a fascinating and endlessly variable tension is set up in both media between two levels of musically represented reality, and the codes that represent them.

It is by no means stretching a point, therefore, to say that movies became the operas of the twentieth century. The creative energy that used to be invested in the opera business now goes into the movie industry, and so do the financial resources. The blockbuster emotional experiences that operas used to deliver are now far more dependably administered by the big screen. All that opera can uniquely claim (and of course it is a big thing) is the charismatic dramatic singer. But since the 1930s, charismatic opera singers have exercised their powers almost exclusively in the museum repertory, not the contemporary one. Most contemporary composers have not even called upon their services, having been convinced by a combination of academic theorizing and sour grapes that they should aim "above" the level of audience appeal.

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Film music

Erich Wolfgang Korngold

Film music

FROM VIENNA TO HOLLYWOOD

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The transmutation of opera into film is neatly—maybe even a little too neatly—epitomized by the career of the Viennese composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897–1957), a composing prodigy on the order of Mozart and Mendelssohn. In 1907, aged ten, he played a cantata he had composed to Mahler, who pronounced him a genius and sent him to Alexander von Zemlinsky—Schoenberg's former mentor—for study. At the age of eleven he composed a ballet that was performed to wide acclaim at the Vienna Court Opera in 1910, when Korngold was thirteen. From then on he was famous. His *Sinfonietta*, op. 5, composed when he was fifteen, aroused "awe and fear" in Richard Strauss, who pronounced Korngold's "firmness of style, sovereignty of form, individuality of expression, and harmonic structure" to be the equal of any living composer's.

Korngold was one of the most active and successful participants in the explosive operatic culture of Weimar Germany. His third opera, *Die tote Stadt* ("The dead city," 1920), on which he began work at the age of twenty, spread his fame throughout the world, with successful productions in Prague, Budapest, Antwerp, Lwów (Poland), and New York, to mention only those outside the German-speaking countries. It is a symbolist drama, with an action that takes place in a space ambiguously located between dream and reality. The music is sophisticated both in structure (the use of leitmotifs) and in sonority, the young Korngold being, among other things, a virtuoso orchestrator. With its gorgeous imagery of death and luxuriant decay, *Die tote Stadt* is often cited, despite the composer's extreme youth (which precluded "genuine" world-weariness), as the supreme monument of musical "decadence."

Decadence was a little old-fashioned in the age of *neue Sachlichkeit*, but that did not impede the opera's success, and Korngold followed up on it with an even more sumptuous expressionist drama, *Das Wunder der Heliane* ("Heliane's miracle", 1927), which contained an eight-minute nude scene for the title character that put even the one in Strauss's *Salome* (not to mention Hindemith's coy bathtub aria) in the shade. The music was an epitome of everything that Asafyev declared outdated: fat, round, heavy, swooning, slow-moving, full of puffy sublimated waltzes. It was the music of romantic "hypnosis" par excellence, and never was a musical hypnotist more adept than Korngold.

He commanded the full panoply of Wagnerian and Straussian resources with a routined virtuosity that exceeded Wagner's and Strauss's, thanks to advances both in orchestral technology and orchestrational know-how. By the use of harp glissandos and brass harmonics, Korngold pioneered effects of orchestral portamento—the illusion of continuously sliding pitch to enhance and intensify modulations—that conspired with perpetual tempo rubato and constantly waxing and waning dynamics to produce (in Ortega's sense) the most "humanized," and (in Hulme's sense) the most "vital" orchestral music ever written. One technical detail is indicative: the celesta, Richard Strauss's *sauce piquante* (to speak in "culinary" terms), which famously adorned the scene of awakening love in *Der Rosenkavalier*, mutates with Korngold into an indefatigably churning section of keyboard and mallet instruments—xylophone, glockenspiel, harmonium, piano, organ, and even the rare *glockenklavier*, a set of tubular bells attached to a keyboard—that oozes endless aromatic goo.

Listeners to Korngold's music were sensually surfeited and emotionally buffeted to a degree that not even Strauss or Scriabin attempted. In his operas, particularly *Heliane*, he applied these hypnotic techniques to subject matter that combined bombastic religiosity and coy eroticism to produce something that might usefully be christened "sacroporn," and that has become very familiar indeed to movie audiences from Hollywood's many mythical and biblical epics. It was very popular with the opera audience that later became the movie audience. During his heyday in the 1920s, Korngold tied with Schoenberg in a newspaper poll to name the greatest living composer.

But his career was abruptly cut short in 1938, when Austria joined Germany in the Nazi Third Reich, and Korngold had to join the great wave of Jewish emigration. Actually, Korngold was already in America when the Austro-German *Anschluss* (annexation) took place. The theatrical director Max Reinhardt, who as a German rather than an Austrian Jew had to flee from Hitler earlier than Korngold, invited the composer to Hollywood in 1934 to arrange Mendelssohn's music for Reinhardt's film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Korngold accepted a contract as a staff composer at the Warner Brothers studio. Between 1935 and 1946 he furnished original scores for nineteen films, and won two Oscars. After *Die Kathrin* (1939), already in progress when he went to America, Korngold never wrote another opera.

But of course he was writing opera all along. Korngold never had to adapt his style in any way to the exigencies of the new medium; it was perfectly suited. The style of Viennese opera that Korngold inherited and extended became the Hollywood style of the 1930s and 1940s, as established not only by Korngold but by other Central European immigrants like Max Steiner (1888–1971), who was in Hollywood as early as 1929. It was Steiner who pioneered the techniques of "underscoring" or putting continuous, leitmotif-laden music behind the dialogue in a talking picture, and this is what enabled the mutation of opera into cinema in method as well as style.

Perhaps the finest operatic scene that Korngold ever wrote was the love scene from *Anthony Adverse* (1936), his third original score and one of the two that earned him Academy Awards. The opulently swooping, endlessly modulating music could be spliced right into *Das Wunder der Heliane*. The Tristanesque "Night" sequence from *Another Dawn*, Korngold's second Hollywood feature, accompanied the ardent confessions of Kay Francis and Errol Flynn with a solo violin and a quartet of cellos to stand in for the lovers' voices. It later furnished the thematic basis for the first movement of Korngold's Violin Concerto (Ex. 9-21). Composed in 1945 for Jascha Heifetz (1901–87), perhaps the greatest virtuoso violinist of the time, it, too, was a sublimated operatic scene, nostalgically evoking the vanished world that Korngold once inhabited, and that he had helped transform.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Serge Rachmaninoff

Nikolai Medtner

Richard Addinsell

A NEW STILE ANTICO?

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 Lost—or Rejected—Illusions
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

ex. 9-21 Erich Korngold, Violin Concerto, beginning of first movement

fig. 9-6 Serge Rachmaninoff, caricature by Alfred Bendiner.

Hollywood, it might seem, had provided a haven for a musical style that had become outmoded in the concert hall and opera house. The phenomenon could be interpreted in two ways. One could argue that the older style, having lost its contemporaneity (and therefore its authenticity), could only serve in a functional or auxiliary capacity, as an adjunct to the movies, administering emotional stimulation to audiences whose minds were elsewhere. That is how theorists in the tradition of the New German School interpreted it. But one could also argue that the "serious" arts, having fallen victim to the false assumptions of modernism, which measured aesthetic value only in terms of technical innovation, had lost their ability to communicate with any but snob audiences, hence were no longer viable or legitimate. The widening gap between the ordinary concert repertory and the predilections of modernist composers could be cited as evidence for either position: either that audiences were no longer paying due attention, or that modern music was no longer viable.

Both positions had fanatical and prestigious advocates. The most effective antimodernist standard bearer was Rachmaninoff, the virtuoso composer-performer mentioned toward the beginning of this chapter in conjunction with Prokofieff. His position in the public eye and his excellent reputation as an interpreter of the "museum repertory" (not to mention his box-office popularity) allowed Rachmaninoff's very conservative music to join that museum repertory at a time when audiences and concert promoters were often actively resistant to modernist music. There were many, during the 1920s and 1930s, who regarded him as the greatest living composer, precisely because he was the only one who seemed capable of successfully maintaining the familiar and prestigious style of the nineteenth-century "classics" into the twentieth century. The fact that he was in fact capable of doing so, moreover, and that his style was as distinctive as any contemporary's, could be used to refute the modernist argument that traditional styles had been exhausted.

Rachmaninoff's piano concertos, particularly the Second (1901) and the Third (1909), were repertory items at a time when the works of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bartók, and all the other modernists were considered specialty items at best; and his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* for piano and orchestra (1934), a set of variations on the theme of Paganini's Twenty-Fourth Caprice—which had already served Liszt and Brahms as a basis for virtuoso variations—might be called the very latest contribution to the standard (as opposed to the "modern") concert repertory. Modernists derided him: Virgil Thomson, the American composer who in the 1940s was the country's most influential music critic, called Rachmaninoff's music "mainly an evocation of adolescence," and "no part of our intellectual life."[29] But Rachmaninoff's stature was commanding, and his reputation was not only undamaged but, in the eyes of his admirers, even enhanced by modernist abuse.

He could afford to remain largely aloof from the captious criticism he attracted, but one of the variations in the Paganini Rhapsody seems to have been a joke at his critics' expense. The eighteenth variation (Ex. 9-22), which has an independent fame, is the most unabashedly and "anachronistically" romantic of the lot in its expressive gestures. "I wrote it for my manager," the composer (an inveterate jester behind his trademark scowl) sardonically confessed; and indeed, it recalled the manner, if not the style, of Chaikovsky, Rachmaninoff's early mentor, who had died more than forty years previously (and of Chopin's century-old Nocturnes behind Chaikovsky). But it is also the most intellectually and "modernistically" contrived. It uses the device of melodic inversion, which was not only a stock resource of academic counterpoint, but also a mainstay of Schoenberg's "atonal" motivic processes. Perhaps needless to say, though, Rachmaninoff's dissonances were entirely unemancipated.

ex. 9-22 Serge Rachmaninoff, *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, 18th variation

Yet if Rachmaninoff's eminence and success insulated him from debate, his rather small output during his years of exile after 1917 may reflect discouragement after all at the reception his music was receiving from connoisseurs, as well as the limits his concert career placed on his composing time. Other traditionalists adopted a more embattled and polemical stance. A curious counterpart to Rachmaninoff was his close friend and fellow émigré Nikolai Medtner (1880–1951), another brilliant piano virtuoso whose composing career, however, lacked the luster—or at least the publicity—of Rachmaninoff's.

While in Russia, Medtner was, as one admirer put it, "Moscow's recognized composer,"[30] especially after the deaths of Chaikovsky and Sergey Taneyev, Medtner's teacher, who was known as the "Russian Brahms." But having left Russia after the revolution, he found himself without an audience. His first destination was Germany; but the Germany he found in 1921 was not the Germany of Brahms or even the Germany of Mahler. It was the Germany of Weill and Hindemith and Schoenberg, and Medtner fled—to Paris. But the

Paris he fled to was the Diaghilevized Paris where his countrymen Stravinsky and Prokofieff reigned supreme, and where Medtner for ten years suffered an agony of neglect.

In 1935 he moved again, to England, whose then somewhat provincial musical climate offered him a more congenial environment. He once again became the center of a small but fairly influential coterie cult of fanatical admirers, who gave Medtner's music more exposure on London's concert stages than it ever had in Berlin or Paris. In London, too, he found a somewhat unlikely patron: the Maharajah of Mysore, the rich ruler of an Indian feudal state, who established "The Medtner Society" to subsidize a grandiose project to record the composer's complete works in his own performances. Medtner lived to complete three big sets of 78 RPM discs before his death.

With every move, Medtner found himself further on the margins of Europe's musical life; and his final triumph with the assistance of an eccentric maharajah only underscored that marginality. He was painfully right to see his marginalism in social as well as artistic terms. In Paris, where he suffered most acutely from neglect, what particularly galled him was Stravinsky's snob appeal. He attended the 1924 concert at which Stravinsky unveiled his "neoclassical" Concerto for Piano and Winds, and wrote to Rachmaninoff about it in a rage. The first item on the program was Stravinsky's *Firebird* suite. Medtner found, to his surprise, that he liked it:

> But then the composer appeared with his new concerto and gave me such a box on the ear for my silly sentimentality that I couldn't bear to stay until the end of *The Rite of Spring*, the more so as it showed its stuff right from the start. I walked out. But the public, who had filled the Paris Grand Opera to overflowing, this public who takes it as an insult if someone should appear in its midst in anything but tails or a smoking jacket (for which reason I had to hide myself and my little grey coat in the highest loges)—this public steadfastly withstood every slap in the face and every humiliation, and what is more, rewarded the author with deafening applause. What is all this?![31]

What it was, of course, was irony, something for which neither Medtner nor Rachmaninoff could muster a proper sympathy, which is why they—and all "sincere" romantics—had to suffer after the Great War. Medtner fought back with a book called *Muse and Fashion* (*Muza i moda*, 1935), in which he thunderously defined "modernism" as

> The fashion for fashion. "Modernism" is the tacit accord of a whole generation to expel the Muse, the former inspirer and teacher of poets and musicians, and install Fashion in her place, as autocratic ruler and judge. But since only what has been begotten by Fashion can go out of fashion, modernists are eternally the victims of her caprices and changes, victims that are constantly doomed by her to "epigonism" [epigone, from Greek = latecoming mediocrity]. The fear of this "epigonism" compels the cowardly artist to run after Fashion, but she, the artful wench, does not stop in her flight, and always leaves him behind.[32]

But since the book was written in Medtner's native Russian, and found no translator until the year of the author's death (and then into English, not French), it was even easier to ignore than his music. But the music was not negligible. It merits sampling here as much for its intrinsic interest and distinction as for its illustrative value. What it illustrates is what long seemed a musical world irrevocably divided between those who wrote "audience music" and those who wrote "composers' music," those who placed their art at the service of its consumers and those who placed it, so to speak, at the service of its history. It was a situation in some ways reminiscent of the seventeenth century, when the old polyphonic style that Monteverdi called the *prima prattica* hung on (as the *stile antico*) into the age of the *basso continuo*—a "Renaissance" idiom coexisting with the "Baroque" in seeming violation of the "law of stylistic succession."

But of course that "law" was only written in the nineteenth century, and the coexistence of diverse practices in the seventeenth century was peaceful because there was a consensus as to what style served what function. (The "old style" was used exclusively for utilitarian church music.) In the twentieth century coexistence was not peaceful. Those who upheld the "law" and its attendant ideology, and those (like

Korngold, Rachmaninoff, and Medtner) who resisted or defied it were factions vying for legitimacy. The upholders always have an edge in the history books, even in this one, because historiography, if it is to be interesting, has to give preference to change over stasis.

But the stasis, it should be emphasized in fairness, was only relative. Even within recognizably "old" styles there was room for freshness and originality as long as imaginative composers were drawn to them; and as long as that was the case, the styles could not be declared dead except as propaganda. Among Medtner's most distinguished pieces was a series of compositions for piano he called *Skazki*, "Tales." It was a time-honored romantic genre, related to the ballade, and practiced particularly by Schumann, who wrote sets of chamber pieces with "*Märchen*" in their titles (*Märchenbilder*, "Pictures from a book of tales," for viola and piano; *Märchenerzählungen*, "Tale-Tellings," for piano, clarinet, and viola). The tale itself was never specified; it was the atmosphere of "telling" that romantic composers liked to evoke.

Medtner's eleven sets *of skazki* were composed between 1905 and 1928, a span of years that encompassed the heydays of both "maximalism" and "neoclassicism." They give no evidence of awareness of either tendency, however, preserving instead the kind of careful miniaturist workmanship and intimate expressivity associated with Chopin, or with the late piano music of Brahms. The set of four *skazki*, op. 26, were written in 1912, contemporaneously with *The Rite of Spring*. The third of them, in F minor, is sampled in Ex. 9-23. It will make a jarring contrast with the rest of the music discussed in this chapter and the last (excepting Korngold's and Rachmaninoff's, of course), and that is part—but only part—of the reason for showing it here.

Looked at superficially or impatiently, or otherwise "from afar," the music may seem stylistically undistinguished, since the limits within which the composer chose to work were familiar—indeed, long-familiar—ones. But a close look, sensitive to particulars, uncovers details of surprising interest. Compare Ex. 9-23a, the opening "perfectly ordinary" 16-measure theme, for example, with Ex. 9-23b, its recapitulation at "Tempo I." The modulation back to the original key, delayed until the theme is more than half over, is handled with a subtlety and aplomb that would have done any composer proud in 1882, and would have earned its author then a reputation for harmonic ingenuity. Is the harmony any less ingenious or the idea any less original because the music was composed thirty years later? Does the music accomplish less, or mean something different, because it comes later? To such questions there can be no simple or categorical answer. They stand here as a symbolic gateway to debate—the most pervasive musical debate of the twentieth century, with ramifications at every level from the most narrowly stylistic to the most broadly political or sociological.

ex. 9-23a Nikolai Medtner, *Skazka*, Op. 26, no. 3, mm. 1-16

To end the chapter with one last ironic fillip, we may observe that the twentieth-century *stile antico*, represented here by Korngold, Rachmaninoff, and Medtner, did conform after all, in certain respects, to its seventeenth-century "functional" or "utilitarian" prototype. As already suggested by Korngold's career in the movies, the style could function as an emotional illustrator, available to composers, themselves without any personal stylistic commitment, who were adept at manipulating a great range of styles for "semiotic" or signaling purposes in various commercial undertakings from 'B' movies to advertising.

ex. 9-23b Nikolai Medtner, *Skazka*, Op. 26, no. 3, recapitulation

Thus the "Rachmaninoff concerto" style ended up in Hollywood anyway—or, to be more exact, in Ealing, Hollywood's British counterpart. Lots of British movies of the 1940s used the heroic piano concerto idiom as a suitably turbulent device for "underscoring" passionate romantic dialogue. And in one film, *Dangerous Moonlight* (1941), an ersatz Rachmaninoff concerto functions as a major plot element. The main character is a Polish concert pianist in exile, modeled on Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941), both a great virtuoso and a Polish patriot, who served from 1919 to 1921 as the first prime minister of independent Poland. The movie character uses his concert travels to perform espionage services for the Allies in the early days of World War II. His signature piece, both performed as such in the movie and used as underscoring material, was a six-minute concerto movement composed by Richard Addinsell (1904–77), England's most prominent film composer of the period. Under the title "Warsaw Concerto" it even became a "pops concert" repertory item (Ex. 9-24).

ex. 9-24 Richard Addinsell, second theme from "Warsaw Concerto"

Theodor W. Adorno, the most vigilant critic of utilitarian music (whether avant-garde *Gebrauchsmusik* or Hollywood romanticism) seized upon what he saw as the generic "devolution" of nineteenth-century styles from the autonomous and absolute artworks of "authentic" romanticism to the commercial and functional soundtracks of capitalist exploitation to support his contention that the styles themselves had become "commodified"—that is, turned from avenues of possibly sincere and spontaneous human expression to mercantile fetishes that manipulate listeners, rob them of emotional authenticity, and reduce them to automatons. Romantic styles, he argued, once co-opted by the movies, could only produce the effects of movie-music, drugging and paralyzing listeners with sensuous pleasure. Such a style was therefore obsolete as art, available only as entertainment, which for Adorno was socially regressive by definition. This was the strongest invective ever mustered on behalf of the "law of stylistic succession."

But the joke turned out to be on Adorno, since (as already hinted above in connection with *Wozzeck*), the modernist styles he regarded as most artistically viable—that is, those least amenable to commercial exploitation because least sensuously appealing to passive consumers—have also long since been annexed by the movies as emotional illustrators, albeit for the opposite sorts of emotions. In 1942, Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler, by then both refugees from Hitler living in Los Angeles, collaborated on *Hangmen Also Die*, a Hollywood *filme noir* directed by Fritz Lang, another émigré, about the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the officer in charge of the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands. Eisler's score contains many atonal passages to illustrate German brutality and Czech suffering. The earliest twelve-tone movie score was composed in 1955 by Leonard Rosenman, who had studied with Schoenberg at UCLA, for *The Cobweb*, a movie set in an insane asylum. There seems to be nothing inherently more or less exploitable about idioms as such. Nor, given the high premium placed on social function by many disillusioned modernists after the Great War, can one maintain that autonomy was any more an inherent feature of modernism than it had once been of romanticism. As we have seen repeatedly, in many contexts, what looks like inherence within one "discourse" or mode of articulated thought can be easily shown (within another) to be an aspect of use.

Notes:

(29) Virgil Thomson, "On Being Discovered" (1965); *A Virgil Thomson Reader*, ed. John Rockwell (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), p. 410.

(30) Leonid Sabaneyeff, *Modern Russian Composers* (New York: International Publishers, 1927), p. 135.

(31) Nikolai Medtner to Sergei Rachmaninoff, 28 May 1924; N. K. Medtner, *Pis'ma*, ed. Z. A. Apetyan (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1973), p. 271.

(32) Nicolas Medtner, *The Muse and the Fashion*, trans. Alfred J. Swan (Haverford, Pa.: Haverford College Bookstore, 1951), p. 100.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 10 The Cult of the Commonplace

Satie, the French "Six," and Surrealism; Thomson and the "Lost Generation"

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 The Cult of the Commonplace
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

THE ANTI-PETRUSHKA

Not long ago, an apple orchard would have suggested to Rimsky-Korsakov, or even to the young Stravinsky, a secret, mysterious place, an impenetrable jungle, whereas in our day the poet seeks an ordinary apple on Olympus, an apple without artifice or complications, which is the most flavorful kind.[1]

—Sergey Diaghilev (1924)

Never any magic spells, reprises, sleazy caresses, fevers, miasmas. Never does Satie "stir up the swamp."[2]

—Jean Cocteau (1918)

On 18 May 1917, at the very height of the Great War, Sergey Diaghilev's Ballets Russes unveiled a new work—a "ballet réaliste" in one scene, called *Parade*—at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, where six years earlier Stravinsky's *Petrushka* had premiered. There was nothing at all Russian about this new Ballets Russes offering. The music was by Erik Satie, the scenario was by Jean Cocteau, the sets and costumes were by Pablo Picasso. The choreographer, Leonid Massine, was Russian, it was true (as were all of Diaghilev's choreographers), but the steps he designed were not.

The cast of characters somewhat resembled that of *Petrushka*. A *parade*, in French, means not only what in English is called a parade, but also a sideshow performed outside a vaudeville theater or "music hall" to lure a crowd. So the new ballet featured a conjurer, an oriental entertainer, and other carnival performers. But whereas in *Petrushka* the magically animated characters had interacted in a conventional love melodrama culminating in murder, the characters in *Parade* simply went about their everyday business: the conjurer conjured, the acrobats did acrobatics, a "little American girl" pantomimed a silent movie. Whatever latent drama there was went undramatized.

Except, that is, the drama of art thwarted by the uncomprehending crowd, the perennial self-pitying myth of the avant-garde. Despite the energetic "barking" and gesticulation provided by the managers (or "impresarios") of three competing theaters, the crowd thinks the free samples are the show itself. The managers, having exhorted the dumb yokels in vain, fall in an apoplectic heap. The sideshow performers then try to get the prospective audience to enter the theaters, but again to no avail. The ballet action comes to no conclusion, simply peters out.

The actual audience in the ballet theater, whose members presumably went gladly enough to circuses and music halls to see actual conjurors, dancers, and acrobats, hated *Parade*. Openly they objected to the incongruously "low" level of taste to which it seemed to pander, insulting ballet's proud aristocratic heritage; covertly, they may have resented the rudimentary story line's implied insult to themselves, the dumb yokels, ostensibly the object of the artist's solicitation, but in reality an object of contempt. In any case, the premiere

was another succès de scandale to set beside *The Rite of Spring*. People hissed and booed this seemingly bland, innocuous offering just as they had Stravinsky's crashingly dissonant, violent ballet four years ago. Like it, the new ballet had touched a nerve.

Cocteau suggested, indignantly, that the audience had refused to consider that art could be beautiful "without an intrigue of mysticism, of love, or of annoyance."[3] They would have been pleased, he tauntingly protested (recalling *Petrushka*'s great success), only "if the acrobat had loved the little girl and had been killed by the jealous conjuror, killed in turn by the acrobat's wife, or any of thirty-six other dramatic combinations." So banal, he implied, had notions of high art become in the wake of romanticism, and so depraved were the expectations of its audience.

But his words need to be taken with a grain—no, a quarry—of salt. Cocteau knew well enough that artistic frivolity was suspect in a time of bloody conflict. *Parade*'s very insouciance, its "cultivated apathy"[4] (in the words of the cultural historian Daniel Albright), and its flagrant neglect of current events were all deliberate provocations. Its very lack of response, as Albright points out, made it "one of the profoundest artistic responses to the Great War," a display of emotional scar tissue. It was Cocteau's pointed answer to Diaghilev's famous challenge, "Étonne-moi" (Astonish me). He had succeeded in astonishing Diaghilev and the audience alike, precisely by avoiding any conventional attempt to astonish or impress. And so did Satie's primitive, clumsily orchestrated, emotionally aloof score.

There was enough melodrama in ordinary life, *Parade* implied. Let art celebrate ordinariness—"normalcy," to use President Harding's war-weary word—as the precious thing it is. That was the "realism" the ballet's subtitle advertised. But that word, too, carried an ironic freight. For one thing, thanks to technology, contemporary reality now contained a great deal of unreality. Movies (still silent), the newest of the entertainment media and the only specifically twentieth-century one, symbolized this invasion of the real by the imaginary. Movies were a part of everyone's everyday life and yet, at the same time, they were of all media the most instantaneously transporting and manipulative—which is to say the most unreal. They offered an alternative (or what we now call a "virtual") reality through which the imagination could truly supersede the senses.

Parade was the first work of "high art" to pay tribute to the movies. The American girl's routine was a collage of impressions from France's great ally across the sea, most of them carried to the French imagination via celluloid. Cocteau sent this description to Satie to guide him in fashioning the music:

> The *Titanic*—"Nearer My God to Thee"—elevators... steamship gear—*The New York Herald*—dynamos —airplanes...palatial movie houses—the sheriff's daughter—Walt Whitman...cowboys with leather and goat-skin chaps—the telegraph operator from Los Angeles who marries the detective in the end...phonographs...the Brooklyn Bridge—huge automobiles of enamel and nickel...Nick Carter [the detective hero of countless turn-of-the-century American "dime novels"]...the Carolinas—my room on the seventeenth floor...posters...Charlie Chaplin.[5]

To the choreographer, Cocteau sent some more details: the American girl's dance should mime the characteristic poses of silent picture stars Mary Pickford (1893–1979), "America's sweetheart," and Pearl White (1889–1938), the heroine of the *Perils of Pauline* serials: riding a horse, catching a train, driving a Model T Ford, swimming, playing cowboys and Indians, shuffling with feet splayed `a la Charlie Chaplin. To accompany these antics, Satie fashioned a motley of ostinatos (perhaps a take-off on the notorious ostinatos of *The Rite of Spring*) surrounding a central *Rag-time du paquebot* ("Passenger-steamer rag") that turns out to be a parody of *That Mysterious Rag*, a popular number by Irving Berlin (1888–1989), a Russian-born composer who was by then already the leading figure in Tin Pan Alley, America's popular song and sheet-music industry. Satie's C-major tune (Ex. 10-1a) matches the rhythm of Berlin's (Ex. 10-1b) exactly, while the melody diverges, though never far.
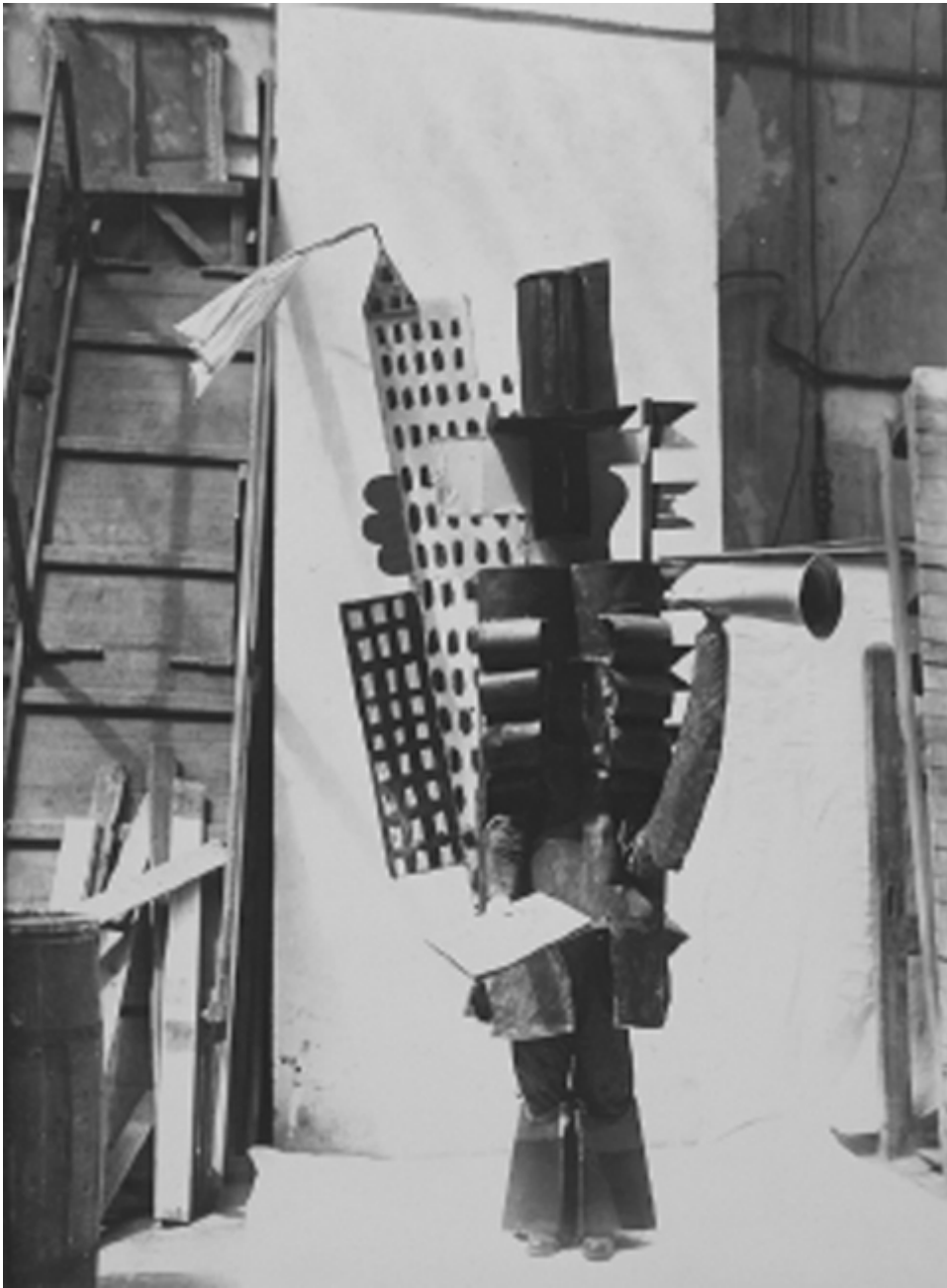
fig. 10-1 "The American Impresario," costume by Picasso for Satie's *Parade*.

More evidence of the antirealism (magic realism, dream realism) of *Parade*'s "realism" were Picasso's costumes, especially the huge modernistic constructions—cubist paintings come to life—worn by the "impresarios" (amiable caricatures of Diaghilev, perhaps) as they gesticulated from the sides of the stage (Fig. 10-1). The score contains "parts" for such realistic sounds of modern life (whether as lived or as cinematically experienced) as a lottery wheel, a steamboat whistle, a siren, a pistol, a typewriter, and a "bouteillophone," a row of beverage bottles played like a xylophone. There was also something called *flaques sonores* ("sound puddles"), which Satie never defined. He may have had in mind the sound of a boot stepping in a puddle, common enough on city streets, but he never let on. Every conductor of the score has had to realize the effect somehow. (Ernest Ansermet, who led the premiere, used suspended cymbals struck with sponge-tipped drumsticks.) In their balletic context, however, these "realistic" sounds were anything but realistic. Abstracted from "life" and placed in a zany world of art, their everyday quality became uncanny.

ex. 10-1a Erik Satie, *Parade, Rag-time du paquebot* episode in piano score

The poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), who at the time was experimenting in his verse with something similar—casual or colloquial language and homely imagery in startling juxtapositions—tried to capture this effect in a promotional piece he wrote for Diaghilev that appeared in the newspapers in advance of the *Parade* premiere, and then in the program book. This little article became famous for the way it conveyed the enchantment that could arise out of artistic transformations of the ordinary. It being wartime, the article also made a nationalistic appeal: Apollinaire saw in *Parade* a chance to shift the center of artistic gravity permanently away from Germany toward France. Out of these two notions Apollinaire developed and described a new sensibility, to which he gave a name that became a watchword.

First of all, in Satie's music Apollinaire claimed to find "a clarity and simplicity in which you can see the wonderfully lucid mind of France itself"⁶ (The phrase "clarity and simplicity" practically became a religious mantra to many French and French-influenced musicians.) Second, Picasso's and Massine's collaboration, in which the impresarios' costumes looked like walking stage sets, succeeded in "consummating for the first time a union between painting and the dance—between the plastic and the mimic—which heralds the arrival

of a more complete art." Third, the American girl, "as she cranks an imaginary car, will express the magic of everyday life" and give the audience a chance "to appreciate the grace of modern movement—something they had never suspected." For all these reasons, Cocteau had misnamed his grand collaborative enterprise a "realistic ballet." To communicate the full effect of "this new alliance" of media, Apollinaire decided, a new word was needed: "*sur-réalisme*."

ex. 10-1b Irving Berlin, *That Mysterious Rag*

Apollinaire's word immediately shed its hyphen and entered the vocabulary of modern art around the world. It was a brilliant find: the original hyphen made it clear that *surréalisme* had been coined on an analogy with, but in scathing contradistinction to, the standard French word *surnaturalisme*—"supernaturalism," the very thing the new art rejected. The core concept was a collage of ordinary unmagical things from which the supernatural was rigorously excluded. What lent the magic was not the things but the collage itself. The word—from *coller*, "to paste" or "stick together"—had been coined a few years earlier, in 1912, when Picasso began pasting household items into his paintings (at first a swatch of a tablecloth, later bits of newspaper, postage stamps, etc.)

The idea stemmed indirectly from Dada, the movement that sought to extend the concept of art to its limits—or rather, to find out what those limits were—by exhibiting mundane items (most famously, a urinal) as if they were artworks. But in Picasso's collages, and in what eventually became surrealist art, there was no "as if." The assemblage was artful by design: in collage, art was not challenged by reality, but rather the reverse. The recognizable world was subverted by decontextualization—or recontextualization in incongruous juxtapositions—and became a dream world. (Needless to say, the movement has attracted psychoanalytical interpreters, and some of its practitioners—notably the Spanish painter Salvador Dali [1904–89]—studied and ostentatiously quoted the work of Freud.) Given the definition Apollinaire implied, one of everyday reality transfigured by an estranging context, the first surrealist work, in advance of the name, was arguably another ballet produced by Diaghilev: *Jeux* ("Games"), conceived and choreographed by the great dancer Vaslav Nijinsky to music by Debussy (the only ballet the French master ever completed). It was first performed on 15 May 1913, just two weeks before the tumultuous premiere of *The Rite of Spring*, and was more or less forgotten amid the publicity Stravinsky's ballet generated. Debussy's score, which he published as a *poème dansé*, was one of his most sumptuous and shimmering, his ultimate masterpiece of "impressionism." Its harmonic and coloristic subtlety, its narrow but endlessly calibrated dynamic range (out of 700 measures only 150 are marked louder than *piano*) and its kaleidoscopically shifting motivic patterns have all fascinated composers, and the music has had a respectable life in repertory as an orchestral showpiece.

The ballet itself, however, was a fiasco; for the scenario Debussy's mysterious music accompanied consisted of a tennis game played by a boy (Nijinsky) and two girls in ordinary tennis clothes on an ordinary court. The action consists not of tennis but of flirtation, and the ending is deliberately enigmatic: a lost tennis ball from another court suddenly drops into their midst, and the characters all flee the stage. The idea of defamiliarizing the ordinary is apparent enough, but Debussy's impressionist style, thanks especially to *Pelléas et Mélisande*, had been irrevocably marked as *surnaturaliste*. The new ballet's mixture of the natural and the supernatural failed to convince: the danced scenario and the music seemed like oil and water.

Notes:

(1) Sergey Diaghilev to Boris Kochno, 22 July 1924; Boris Kochno, *Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 226.

(2) Jean Cocteau, *A Call to Order*, trans. Rollo H. Myers (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926), p. 25.

(3) *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

(4) Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 197.

(5) Quoted in Nancy Perloff, *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 113.

(6) Guillaume Apollinaire, "Parade," *Excelsior*, 11 May 1917.

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Francis Poulenc

Darius Milhaud

"LIFESTYLE MODERNISM"

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 The Cult of the Commonplace
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

After the war, or rather after *Parade*, the line initiated by *Jeux* was continued by a new crop of very young French composers who venerated Satie, and who were eager to cast off the trappings of impressionist mystery (by then a cliché and an unwelcome French stereotype) and celebrate the artistically transfigured "everyday." Diaghilev enthusiastically commissioned and produced their work, which was (partly thanks to his patronage) considered the last word in sophistication. Three one-act ballets that received their premieres in 1924 and 1925 typified the new genre, aptly christened "lifestyle modernism"[7] by the ballet historian Lynn Garafola.

First came *Les biches* by Francis Poulenc (1899–1963), presented on 6 January 1924, the eve of the composer's twenty-fifth birthday. (He had received the commission at the age of twenty-two.) The title means, literally, "The Does" (i.e., female deer); in the French idiom of the time it was a term of endearment ("*ma biche*" or "*ma bichette*") a man tendered to a young girl he wished to seduce. In English, Poulenc's ballet is usually called "The House Party." Even more plotless than *Parade*, it simply portrayed a soirée, hosted by a rich society matron, at which girls in summer dresses danced and flirted with young men in bathing suits (and occasionally with their hostess or, more daringly, with each other). Poulenc's music, which included a few songs sung from the pit, was a pastiche of three styles: that of the eighteenth-century dance suite (e.g., Couperin), that of French "classical" (i.e., nineteenth-century) ballet, and that of the contemporary dance hall or ballroom. One characteristic number was a *Rag mazurka* (Ex. 10-2). The action suggests an erotic promiscuity comparable to the stylistic promiscuity of the music.

ex. 10-2 Francis Poulenc, *Les biches*, opening bars of *Rag mazurka*

On 13 June 1924, *Le train bleu* ("The blue train") by Darius Milhaud (1892–1974) was unveiled. Composed to a scenario by Cocteau, the ballet depicts an afternoon at a fashionable vacation spot where an elegant train from the capital, "Le Bleu," disgorges new bathers daily. More men in bathing suits do their exercises and practice their favorite sports. That is all. *Les matelots* ("The sailors") by Poulenc's exact contemporary Georges Auric (1899–1983), followed a year later. A simplified and perhaps purposely trivialized version of the story line immortalized in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, it concerns three mariners who visit the fiancée of one right before departing on what they say will be a long voyage. They soon return, however, and, donning false beards, test her fidelity by trying to seduce her. She refuses them, they remove their disguise, and the loving couple is joyfully reunited. The composer described the music euphemistically as a "fantasia on circus themes." Some of his tunes were readily identified by the audience as songs sung in bars and brothels.

Lifestyle modernism was thus another reversion to a preromantic (hence antiromantic) view of art. Like Mozart's (as described by the American musicologist Wye J. Allanbrook), the new French music offered its audiences a sonorous reflection of their own lives (what Allanbrook called "representations of their own humanity"). But the portrayal was deliberately shallow and not very humane. It pointedly avoided emotional

depth and portrayed only the most superficial social activities and amusements; that is why Garafola's seemingly anachronistic adoption of the recent term "lifestyle," which refers implicitly to the routine and material aspects of life, is so appropriate. "Lifestyle," moreover, implies a chosen way of life, which in turn implies comfort and leisure; and indeed, the subject matter of the postwar ballets identified the "reflected audience" explicitly with the moneyed classes who patronized Diaghilev's enterprise. They catered to a revived and newly defined "aristocratic" taste, the somewhat anxiously cynical (or at least insouciant) taste of what was called "the roaring twenties." It was the sensibility of disillusion.

Artists who valued seriousness of purpose were repelled. Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937), for example, the leading composer of newly independent Poland, remained faithful to another kind of modernism, the kind associated before the war with Russia, heavy with that special combination of spiritual elevation and oriental eroticism that evoked the "secret, mysterious places" and "impenetrable jungles" of the soul to which Diaghilev, who had once traded heavily in such items, referred sarcastically in this chapter's epigraph. Szymanowski had offered a ballet to Diaghilev, who rebuffed him with a taunt that his work was a "stew of leftovers." So it is not surprising, perhaps, that Szymanowski became one of the most carping critics of the new Parisian music, denouncing it as "vulgar tavern music"[8] and "mundane trivialities" engineered by that "malicious old man" Satie, who was wreaking revenge on his betters.

Nor did Satie's ballets, or those of his followers, reach the limits of "lifestyle modernism." The malicious old man took the idea to its logical extreme when he conceived of *musique d'ameublement* or "furniture music," described by Milhaud as "background music that would vary like the furniture of the rooms in which it was played," hence, explicitly, "music that would not be listened to."[9] The first experiment, in which Satie and Milhaud dashed off some *ritournelles* (endlessly repeated tunes, some of them quoted from popular concert pieces and operas) to accompany the lobby conversation during the intermissions between the acts of a play by the surrealist poet and painter Max Jacob (1876–1944), was a failure. The audience, obedient to concert decorum, remained seated and paid attention to the music despite Satie's exhortations to "Go on talking! Walk about! Don't listen!"

Later, fulfilling commissions from wealthy friends with little snippets bearing titles like *Tenture de cabinet préfectoral* ("Wall hanging for the boss's office") or *Tapisserie en fer forgé* ("Wrought iron tapestry") or *Carrelage phonique* ("Audible floor tiles"), Satie came closer to fulfilling his intention of actually furnishing a vestibule or salon with music, "adorning it for the ear," as Milhaud put it, "the same way as a still life by Manet might adorn it for the eye."[10] This was art deposed from its pedestal with a vengeance, now assuming a humble utilitarian role of lifestyle-enhancement. One senses a wish to exact penance for the romantic pretensions art had exhibited before the war, and for whatever it might have contributed to the grandiose thinking that had provoked and justified the bloodbath.

That may have been Diaghilev's wish as well; for, although he remained a passionate devotee of Wagner's music to the end of his life, and kept his prewar repertory alive to subsidize his new productions, he never lost an opportunity to mock the work that had made his early reputation, thus (as Poulenc later observed) giving the young artists he now nurtured a lesson in self-renewal. Never before was a generation of artists so exhorted, as Poulenc recalled, "to disown their predecessors, their elders."[11] Whenever Diaghilev would catch Poulenc or Milhaud or Auric at a performance of a prewar ballet, even *Petrushka*, he would taunt them: "You're going to hear that old music? *Mais quel ennui*!" (What a bore!). Triviality was the only escape, frivolity the only salvation.

Penance of another, perhaps related kind is suggested by *Vexations* (Ex. 10-3), a 13-beat, bizarrely notated piece (or fragment) Satie jotted down one day, perhaps as early as 1893, together with its separate bass line, a version with the harmonizing tritones inverted, and a casual note, "play 840 times," all followed by a remark to the effect that if one wants to follow the composer's instructions, one ought to prepare for the ordeal with meditation exercises. Since the time of this little item's posthumous discovery by Robert Caby, one of Satie's disciples, and especially since the famous 1963 concert at which the American composer John Cage (1912–92), leading a team of pianists, gave it a complete performance lasting eighteen hours and forty minutes (now enshrined in the *Guiness Book of World Records*), it has been a cause célèbre and the object of sometimes acrimonious debate.

ex. 10-3 Erik Satie, *Vexations*

Did it (as Cage thought) represent an actual exercise in spiritual transcendence (perhaps plausible in light of the composer's brief involvement in the 1890s with the Rosicrucians, a society of mystics), or was it rather a spoof of such exercises, a disavowal of their connection with the aims of art, and a snare for those humorless enough to take it seriously? That would put the endless little piece in harmony with the antiromantic tenor of lifestyle modernism; and it is hard not to suspect spoofing both in the outlandish note-spelling (B♭♭ "descending" to A♯!) and in the meticulously notated inversions of every tritone, the one interval (aside from the octave) that cannot be acoustically inverted.

Satie's penchant for dadaist cartooning reached its peak in the ballet *Relâche* (1924), his last work, created in collaboration with two early surrealists, the writer Blaise Cendrars (1887–1961) and the painter Francis Picabia (1878–1953). The title is a word (related etymologically to the English "release" or "relax") that was used in French theatrical bills and schedules to denote a night when the theater is not in use (possible English equivalents: "No show," "Theater dark," "Closed") so that unless one reads carefully, a notice of a performance of the work would look like a notice of no performance. Picabia thought that it would symbolize his conviction that all prewar artistic ideas were "out to lunch." Satie claimed credit for the idea, saying that in that way he could have a work of his playing all summer long in every theater in Paris.

As to action, the beginning of the first act set the tone. A ballerina (called Woman in the program) enters, then stops in the middle of the stage, sits down, lights a cigarette and examines the scenery while the orchestra continues playing. Then she gets up and dances while the orchestra stops. The frontispiece to the published score contains a drawing by Picabia in which one gentleman is shown silencing another gentleman (naked except for a top hat and wristwatch) with a note that reads, "When will people get out of the habit of explaining everything?" Between the acts came a little film (shot by René Clair, later a famous director) called *Entr'acte*, that began with Picabia and Satie firing a cannon straight out at the audience and continued with all kinds of strange "automatic" images—boxing gloves fighting with each other, matches lighting themselves—and culminated in a roller coaster ride.

Satie's music was largely a medley of street songs that brought to the audience's mind a collage of offensive

ostinato that kept coming back, at times somewhat varied in pace and harmony, to furnish an appropriate *musique d'ameublement* (Ex. 10-4). The audience was duly scandalized. This time, however, the attempt to offend seemed labored, and the ballet did not live in infamy like *Parade*. The only part to survive the first performances was Clair's *Entr'acte*, for which Satie had written perhaps the first authentic film score, with musical cues timed precisely to match the length of the shots they accompanied.

ex. 10-4 Erik Satie, *Relâche*, two "Entrées"

Notes:

(7) Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 98ff.

(8) Quoted in Stephen Downes, "The Polish Polemicist," *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 October 1999, p. 23.

(9) Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music*, trans. Donald Evans (New York: Alred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 122–23.

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 123.

(11) Francis Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1978), p. 127.

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NAKEDNESS

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 The Cult of the Commonplace
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The fifty-eight-year-old Satie thus ended his career, in keeping with the insistently youthful tenor of the time, not like a grand old man but more like a declining *enfant terrible*. The one serious work of his late years was *Socrate*, a "drame symphonique" that consisted of three extracts from the dialogues of Plato, set for a high (preferably female) solo voice and small orchestra. It was written immediately after *Parade* for the American-born Princesse de Polignac (née Winnaretta Singer), the heiress to a sewing-machine fortune who had married into the French aristocracy and set up a famous salon where she presented "chamber-theatricals" for which she commissioned works by many prestigious artists.

Partly by virtue of their source and subject matter, Satie's Platonic settings were regarded as "neoclassical" even though they made no reference at all to old-fashioned musical forms, whether operatic or instrumental. But once the concept of the *style dépouillé* or "stripped-down style" had been named (by Boris Schloezer) in response to Stravinsky's music of the early 1920s (see chapter 8), *Socrate* was seen as its prototype. Its "denuded" or "white" classicism, even if only retrospectively acknowledged, made it Satie's most enduringly influential composition.

The end of the third movement, *Phédon* (Phaedo), which narrates the death of Socrates, is a setting of the most emotionally charged page in all of Plato. The postwar "ban on all pathos," to recall the mandatory irony described in chapter 8, gives way here to a ban on all eloquence, now the only way to preserve any chance of a sincere expression of emotion. From parallel ascending triads (the movement's main leitmotif) through a succession of rigorously diatonic ostinatos, each lasting several measures (but usually an "honest" four), to the harmonically void drumbeats of the final page (Ex. 10-5), the music ostentatiously displays not only its rejection of ostentatious emotional display, but also its eschewal of technical finesse.

The prominent use of the harp in what is otherwise a very spare orchestra (only seven wind players, a timpanist, and a small body of strings) is the only concession to opulence, but a necessary one for the sake of its associations with the classical lyre. The regularity with which ostinato gives way to ostinato lends the setting of Plato's prose an appearance of poetic scansion, turning into chill ritual chanting at the end. The stony-cold, benumbed mood (in accord with the description of the gradually numbing effect of the poison on Socrates' body) is broken only once, when the singer climbs unexpectedly to a high note while reporting Socrates's noncommittal final words ("Crito, we owe a cock to Esculapus"). Obviously an intrusion of the reporter's emotion rather than a depiction of Socrates's, this tiny breach in the otherwise dignified posture of the setting emphasizes that dignity by contrast. "A lesson in greatness and honesty"[12] was Poulenc's judgment of what to many musicians (then and since) has seemed merely skimpy and technically inept.

After Satie's death the mantle of nakedness—of emphatic antirhetoric and sophisticated naïveté—fell on Poulenc and Milhaud. Poulenc was the composer most closely allied with the poets of surrealism, sometimes including himself. His very first piece, *Rapsodie nègre*, op. 1 (1917), for a *Pierrot lunaire*-influenced ensemble of flute, clarinet, string quartet, and piano, brought in a baritone soloist for one movement, *Honoloulou*. The text, according to the composer, was from a book of verses by a Liberian poet named Makoko Kangourou. (No one has ever found this book.) It begins, "Honoloulou, poti lama!/honoloulou,

honoloulou,/kati moko, mosi bolou/ratakou sira, polama!" The musical setting contradicts the flamboyant nonsense-exoticism with extreme plainness. The voice part, for example, is a pseudo-chant consisting of a descending minor tetrachord endlessly repeated. That plainness in the face of oddity would remain the surrealist formula.

ex. 10-5 Erik Satie, *Socrate*, III, end

Cocardes (1919), a more elaborate concoction for voice and instrumental ensemble, became a sort of manifesto for the composers of Poulenc's youthful generation. The title, "Cockades" in English, refers to ribbons worn as an emblem or badge of membership on hats or uniforms. Just so, the *Cocardes* were a badge of surrealist affiliation. The text, by Cocteau, consisted of three poems—*Miel de Narbonne* ("Honey of Narbonne"), *Bonne d'enfant* ("Children's nurse"), *Enfant de troupe* ("Child of the troupe")—of which the titles were a clue to the sham tour-de-force or gimmick that united the whole. The last syllable of one became the first of the next, and so it was for each line in the poems (including the last, which linked up with the first). Thus, for example, *Miel de Narbonne*:

- *Use* ton coeur. Les clowns fleurissent du crottin *d'or*.
- *Dor*mir! Un coup d'orteil: on *vole*.
- *Vôle*z-vous jouer avec *moã*?
- *Moa*bite, dame de la croix bleue. Cara*vane*.
- *Van*ille. Poivre. Confiture de ta*marin*.
- *Marin*, cou, le pompon, moustaches, mando*line*.
- *Lin*oléum en trompe-l'oeil. Mer*ci*.
- *Ci*néma, nouvelle m*use*.

Or, in "English":

- Use your heart. The clowns flourish on golden manure.
- To sleep! A kick with the toe; one flies.
- Wanna play wiv me?
- Moabite, lady of the blue cross. Caravan.

- **Vanilla. Pepper. Tamarind jam.**
- **Sailor, neck, pompon, moustache, mandolin.**
- **Eye-tricking linoleum. Thanks.**
- **Cinema, new muse.**

The translation, since it lacks the wordplay of the original, is a completely arbitrary assemblage of phrases, most of them nouns that bring a crowd of discordant images to mind. The verbal trick of the original, though it lends "form" to the poem, is as meaningless a technical feat as Schoenberg's triple canon in retrograde in *Pierrot lunaire*. In Schoenberg's case it had been the loosening of the constraints of voice leading and dissonance treatment that made the contrapuntal complexities satirically easy to achieve. (Anybody can write canons if they don't have to be consonant.) In Poulenc's, it is the loosening of the constraints of semantics (and spelling!) that make the verbal dexterity a satirically empty display of skill. (Anybody can make puns if they don't have to mean anything.) The absence of semantic logic, made all the more pointed by a perfectly ordinary verbal logic, is the basic surrealist maneuver. The kaleidoscopic linkages of imagery follow no intelligible pattern, thus reminding the reader of the poem (or the hearer of the songs) of the "dialectics" of dreams. And the essential surrealist *musical* device, as Poulenc (following Satie) demonstrated again and again, was to surround the extravagant dream-imagery with a music that sounded insistently "normal" and commonplace in its evocation of the familiar music of one's surrounding "lifestyle." That was the big difference between the "surrealist" cabaret style, as exemplified by the *Cocardes*, and the "expressionist" one exemplified by *Pierrot lunaire*. Schoenberg's music was deliberately "subjective" and strange; Poulenc's deliberately "objective" and commonplace. Shortly before the first performance, Poulenc wrote to a critic that his songs captured the essence of contemporary Paris "without artifice," and that "they will show you that I am no Impressionist!" (i.e., no trafficker in mysterious places or impenetrable jungles).

The third song (Ex. 10-6) most clearly emphasizes what was "realist" in surrealist. The "ritournelle" at the beginning and the end is exactly like those used in vaudeville theaters (or "music halls") to introduce or follow an act, and the original scoring for violin, cornet, trombone, bass drum, triangle, and cymbal gave it an authentic "fairground" color. The ironic return in the middle, marked *triste* (sad), affects the manner of a vaudeville "song stylist." (Poulenc later confided that he was thinking of Maurice Chevalier [1888–1972], the star song-and-dance man of the Paris music halls, later a character actor in a number of American films.)

ex. 10-6 Francis Poulenc, *Cocardes*, no. 3, end

The commonplaces are of course ironic. Their clash with the verbal extravagances makes them extravagant in their own right. That extravagance, that paradoxical excess, is the "sur" in surrealist. To quote Daniel Albright, "Schoenberg worked to emancipate harmonic dissonance, while Poulenc worked to emancipate semantic dissonance"; or, putting it another way, "Poulenc was original, not in the way that his music sounds, but in the way that his music means."[13] Or again, putting it as Apollinaire put it, surrealism demands that the artistic media "marry often without apparent bond as in life."[14] What makes life lively, Apollinaire implies, is the very lack of intelligible correlation between the sensory stimuli that bombard us from all sides. Surrealist art makes that fortuitous unintelligibility purposeful.

Notes:

(12) *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

(13) Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, p. 288.

(14) Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (1916); quoted in Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, p. 246.

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GENDER BENDING

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 The Cult of the Commonplace
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Apollinaire's famous definition of surrealism came in the prologue to his play *Les mamelles de Tirésias*
("The breasts of Tirésias," 1918), the first explicitly designated "*drame surréaliste*." In 1944, at the height of
another great war, after turning unexpectedly to religious subject matter in several sober choral works that
apparently left his earlier lifestyle modernism behind, Poulenc turned again, just as unexpectedly, to his
surrealist roots and set Apollinaire's by-then-forgotten play to music as his first opera. The new war had
made it timely again.

fig. 10-2 Poulenc, *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* (Metropolitan Opera, New York).

The play's title character, a woman named Thérèse when we first meet her, declares to her husband that she
would rather be a soldier than a mother, grows a beard forthwith, opens her blouse to release her breasts,
which turn out to be rubber balloons, and punctures them. Renamed Tirésias, she becomes a heroic general.
In the second act, the husband, still desiring children, decides to have them by himself and manages to give

birth to more than forty thousand in a single day. In the end, of course, the couple is reconciled, but Tirésias still eschews her breasts; when her husband offers her a bunch of balloons from which to select a pair of new ones, she flings the whole bunch out to the audience.

What might at first have appeared to be the drama's antifeminism is recognized in the end to be what is now called an "antiessentialist" argument. At the end of the play it is extended to call many areas of social division into question. Markers of gender—breasts, beards, childbearing—are cast off and assumed at will by characters of both sexes. So, too, are markers of race or class, which only achieve their divisive effect by convention. The artificiality and mutability of all names is the point at issue. At times the point is made ridiculously, as when Thérèse/Tirésias, moving out, throws her belongings out the window. "The piano!" her husband exclaims as the chamber pot comes flying. "The violin!" he bellows, picking up a urinal. At the end, however, the serious purpose is unironically revealed: both world wars having left France with a decimated generation of men, the country must unite and repopulate. "Scratch yourself wherever you may itch," the whole cast sings across the footlights in conclusion. "Love white or black; variety is delight. It is enough if you only learn this lesson, dear audience: Have children!"

Once again Poulenc affirms the special role music can play in the surrealist collage by utterly banishing anything exotic or otherwise extraordinary from his range of stylistic reference. The music does not try to compete in incongruity with the stage antics, but of course in context its apparent ordinariness is the ultimate incongruity. "I don't have Ravel's elfin sense that ennobles the unusual," Poulenc slyly told an interviewer. Instead, he made the commonplace extraordinary. Not *sur-naturel* but *sur-réaliste*.

Poulenc's setting of the prologue (Ex. 10-7), in which the theater manager "preps" the audience to accept the serious message behind the apparent farce, is a study in double irony. By seeming to accept the manager's seriousness at face value, clothing it in a conventionally beautiful aria in a straightforwardly melancholy diatonic idiom (only slightly spiced with Stravinskianisms), Poulenc puts it doubly in doubt. By refusing to admit grotesquerie into his musical language, Poulenc underscores the grotesquerie of the play. But at the same time the sadly lyrical music acknowledges the reality of the pain and horror that gave rise to Apollinaire's frivolities. The music's consonance, in short, is dissonant. Only at the very end, when the manager sinks gravely through a trap door and out of sight, is there a touch of "magic" in the music: the orchestra for an instant becomes a Balinese gamelan to provide a frame (just as actual Balinese gamelans do) for the dramatic action that follows, a passage into the world of the surreal. Once there, however, the music will resume its studied normalcy.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Darius Milhaud

Milhaud: Works

FROM SUBJECT TO STYLE: SURREALIST "CLASSICISM"

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 The Cult of the Commonplace
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

ex. 10-7 Francis Poulenc, *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, Prologue, 4 to 6

Milhaud's version of surrealism, unlike Poulenc's, sought to penetrate the sound-substance of his music and become in itself an attribute of style. For that reason, Milhaud's achievement is often taken more seriously than Poulenc's both by historians in the tradition of the New German School, who place the highest premium on technical innovation, and by neoclassicists who insist on musical "purity." Inspired by some famous passages in the music of Stravinsky (the C/F♯ fanfares in *Petrushka*) and Richard Strauss (the necrophiliac kiss in *Salome*, the ending of *Also sprach Zarathustra*), Milhaud was impelled to devise a systematic theory of "polytonality," which could be described as a technique for creating collages of keys. He gave the theory a thorough, even somewhat pedantic exposition in an article, "Polytonalité et atonalité," which he published in *La Revue Musicale*, the leading French musicological journal, in 1923. Putting his theory in apposition—hence in competition—with Schoenberg's, Milhaud distinguished them by asserting that "between polytonality and atonality there are the same essential differences as between diatonicism and chromaticism."[15] Polytonality is thus diatonicism multiplied. Milhaud justified it, in time-honored fashion, by tracing it back to Bach (or rather, to strict or "real" counterpoints at intervals other than the octave). But the lineage thus claimed is not convincing: tonal counterpoint is always ready to make adjustments (e.g., "tonal answers") to insure the perceptual ascendancy of a single tonic. At the opposite logical extreme, the mixture of all twelve diatonic tone centers in one stew, polytonality arrives at the same maximum (or meets the same limit) as atonality; to quote Milhaud's article, it "encroaches on the domain of atonality." In Milhaud's actual compositions, however, this never comes close to happening, because, unlike Schoenberg, Milhaud was uninterested in technical maximalism. Instead, as a little survey of Milhaud's polytonal practices will reveal, polytonality made it possible to construct unheard-of harmonies by juxtaposing simple melodies and chords in novel combinations that acquired their piquancy precisely from the recognizability of their homely sources. It was another case of a calculated incongruity that replaced everyday reality with an alternative or magical sur-reality by building fancifully on the real listening experience of real audiences. Rather than polytonality, a term that still offends many theorists who believe (not unreasonably) that combined chords still have single roots, Milhaud's technique might more accurately have been called

"polydiatonicism." But the term "polytonality" is probably here to stay, one of the many misnomers that conventional practice has adopted and ensconced in use beyond hope of correction. We have been coping more or less successfully with "Gregorian chant" for a thousand years, so there is no need to complain.

Milhaud's first crop of polytonal experiments dates from around 1918, when the composer returned to France from Brazil, where he had been serving as secretary to his older friend the poet Paul Claudel (1868–1955), a professional diplomat, who had been appointed cultural attaché at the French embassy in Rio de Janeiro. These early works combined polytonality with exotic South American subject matter. They include a mystical ballet, *L'homme et son désir* ("The man and his desire," 1918), to a scenario by Claudel, which portrayed the Brazilian *floresta*, or tropical jungle, in animistic terms, Milhaud's percussion-heavy polytonal score suggesting the luxuriant growth of vegetation. But they also included the entertaining *Saudades do Brasil* ("Memories of Brazil"), a suite of dances for piano in which vivid recollections of urban popular music are given a surrealistic twist.

Ipanema (Ex. 10-8), the fifth item in the suite, is a samba named after one of the districts of Rio de Janeiro. It could be argued that the harmonies at the opening, in which E♭-minor and F-major triads are reciprocally superimposed every two bars, is not polytonal in any functional sense, since neither harmony is established as a functional tonic. In the middle section, however (mm. 35 ff), the superimposed chords—C and G♭, as in *Petrushka*—are each given dominants. The functional independence is resolved, however, and again, reciprocally, ten bars later.

ex. 10-8a Darius Milhaud, *Saudades do Brasil*, V (*Ipanema*), mm. 1–9

ex. 10-8b Darius Milhaud, *Saudades do Brasil*, V (*Ipanema*), mm. 33–55

More abstractly (or at least less exotically) conceived is the Fourth String Quartet, op. 46 (1918). At the outset (Ex. 10-9), the keys of F major and A major are maintained in a functional equilibrium. Neither one is established by harmonic cadence, but the seven-bar diatonic theme, played first in F in the outer voices and then by the inner voices in A, has clearly functional harmonic implications—as it must, if the idea of polytonality is to have any perceptual validity. The third-relation between the tonics is stable throughout the movement. Still, all discrepancies are reconciled at the end, which is unambiguously in F.

ex. 10-9 Darius Milhaud, String Quartet no. 4, I, mm. 1–15

Some might argue that only the surrealistic collage technique saves the simple dance tune from banality. But one could just as well turn that around and say that only the banality of the dance tune saves the polytonal texture from unintelligibility. As in Poulenc's more conceptual surrealism, Milhaud's functional surrealism depends as much on the ordinariness of the components as on the extravagance of their juxtaposition. The commonplace and the fantastic—or if you prefer, the hackneyed and the preposterous—achieve, ideally, a state of synergy or symbiosis.

Perhaps the ultimate in polydiatonic counterpoint is reached in the third of Milhaud's tiny chamber symphonies, subtitled *Sérénade* (1921), which Milhaud proudly quoted as the culmination of his little theoretical treatise of 1923. Like Stravinsky's *Sérénade en la*, Milhaud's six chamber symphonies, composed between 1917 and 1923, were written so that they could each be recorded on a single 78 RPM side (twelve inches in this case, lasting no more than four minutes). The opening four-bar phrase of the first movement in no. 3 (Ex. 10-10a) pits a simple E-major tune in the clarinet against an equally simple D-major tune in the

bassoon. The pair of tunes in differing keys works as a kind of "module," constantly reappearing in various configurations as the basis for the counterpoint. In m. 9 (Ex. 10-10b) it is played down an octave by the bassoon and cello, against a descending scale in the flute and an ascending arpeggio in the viola that by itself would be assigned to the key of B♭ major. According to Milhaud's own analysis in the *Revue Musicale* article, the violin modulates from F major to C major in m. 10, and the clarinet's chromatic scale is to be considered a support for the violin's F major.

In m. 13 the modular pair is transposed and placed in the extreme outer voices: flute in G major against double bass in C. The bassoon can be construed as playing in D major. At m. 23 the upper voice of the modular pair appears alone in F major in the cello, against an A-major tune in the violin. The passage from m. 17 to m. 30, in which this partial appearance is the only direct reference to the modular pair, might be described as a development section, in which case the reappearance of the original modular pair at m. 31 is the recapitulation.

ex. 10-10a Darius Milhaud, Symphony no. 3 (*Sérénade*), mm. 1–4

The second movement is a study in tritone relationships à la *Petrushka*: B against F, with the F given a "mixolydian" E♭ that concords punningly with the D♯ of B major). The two keys are the mediant and submediant of D, which prepares the way for the finale, in which (a somewhat Lydianized) D major comes through clearly as the dominating key. Thus the whole little symphony can be seen as tending toward its final cadence in good "tonal" fashion, in which case the polytonal texture is perhaps best read as an embellishment or a refreshment of a basic D-major tonality.

ex. 10-10b Darius Milhaud, Symphony no. 3 (*Sérénade*), mm. 9–16

Refreshment, indeed, seems to have been Milhaud's aim. "The resources of polytonality," he wrote, "enrich the expressive resources of music."[16] Its use "adds subtlety and sweetness to *pianissimi*, while to *fortissimi* it lends greater pungency and force." Above all, it renewed the possibility of writing simple diatonic melodies and ordinary chords that would be transfigured by their context, just as surrealism, with its uncanny juxtapositions, gave new life to figurative painting—the painting of real objects, rendered with craftsmanly verisimilitude—in an age of burgeoning cubism and incipient abstraction. The commonplace, the unremarkable, the stock of everyday life were all "rehabilitated" (the word is Cocteau's) within an art that, recovered from "decadence," no longer sought the rare, the recondite, or the occult, and no longer aspired to high eloquence or grandiosity. With high eloquence and grandiosity went romantic aspirations to the sublime. The French music of the postwar period was a desacralized art, an art brought down to earth, a thing made *pour plaire*—"to please"—that is, to exist in and adorn the lives of its users.

Notes:

(15) Darius Milhaud, "Polytonalité et atonalité," *Revue musicale*, Vol. IV (1923); trans. R. Taruskin in P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (2nd ed., Belmont, CA: Thomson/Schirmer, 2007), pp. 400–01.

(16) *Ibid.*, p. 401.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Philosophy of music: Aesthetics

Virgil Thomson

Les Six

GROUPS

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 The Cult of the Commonplace
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Such music, claimed one of its most articulate devotees, was the only contemporary music that "can be enjoyed and appreciated without any knowledge of the history of music."[17] And, for that reason, its "aesthetic" (that is, the basis of its appeal) was "the only twentieth-century aesthetic in the Western world." This was an ambitious and impressive claim indeed, proclaimed on behalf of a music that seemed to forswear ambition and eschew impressiveness, and offered with the deliberately paradoxical conviction that "the only healthy thing music can do in our century is to stop trying to be impressive."

These words were written not by a Frenchman but by the composer-critic Virgil Thomson (1896–1989), whom we have already met casually (in chapter 9). A Harvard-educated Missourian who came to France as a soldier toward the end of the Great War, Thomson stayed on to study composition with Nadia Boulanger, and remained in Paris until the start of the next war. On his return to the United States in 1940 he was hired as a music critic by the *New York Herald Tribune*. He held the post until 1954, during which time the "interwar" Parisian "aesthetic," as Thomson called it, had a very influential spokesman in frequent word and occasional musical deed.

**fig. 10-3 Le Group des Six with Cocteau (left to right: Poulenc,
Tailleferre, Durey, Cocteau, Milhaud, Honegger; Auric is present as
a drawing on the wall, like Mozart's mother in Fig. 30-4).**

Thomson was one of many young American artists in all media who lived as expatriates in Europe, mainly in
Paris, between the world wars. It was a good time to be an American in Paris. The French regarded America
as their wartime savior. French artists and intellectuals like Cocteau, Satie, and the group of younger
composers who gathered around the two of them, idolized and absorbed American popular culture. That
group, called Les Six ("The Six") on an analogy with the Russian "Five," included Poulenc, Milhaud, and
Auric, who (as we have already seen) readily incorporated what they called "jazz"—or, more properly,
American dance-band music—as a component in their "lifestyle modernism." The other three members of
the group, which was somewhat artificially named by the critic Henri Collet on the basis of their chance
appearance together in a concert program in 1920, were somewhat less inclined toward "Americanism" or
lifestyle modernism. They included Arthur Honegger (1892–1955), a French-speaking Swiss who inclined,
like his native country, to an amalgamation of French and German styles, and who won his chief fame on the

strength of his five symphonies and his forceful sacred cantatas; Germaine Tailleferre (1892–1983), whose career eventually foundered on the traditional prejudice against women composers; and Louis Durey (1888–1979), whose left-wing political convictions soon turned him passionately against what he saw as the frivolous values of lifestyle modernism, and to a degree against the values of modern concert music altogether. Durey's music is decidedly obscure, but his lucky charter membership in the celebrated Group of Six (like the membership of the equally shadowy César Cui among the Russian Five) has obliged every subsequent textbook to drop his name, as this one has now done. (In later life Durey wrote workers' choruses on texts by Mao Tse-tung and Ho Chi Minh.)

Having been casually christened by a critic, the Groupe des Six achieved a certain tenuous reality the next year when Cocteau finagled a commission for them (minus the dour Durey) from a Swedish company based in Paris for a collectively composed ballet on a scenario of Cocteau's devising, called *Les mariés de la Tour Eiffel* ("The wedding party on the Eiffel Tower"). As *Parade*'s direct and designated successor, the new ballet synthesized lifestyle modernism with surrealism.

The scenario portrays a perfectly ordinary middle-class wedding party, come to the lowest platform of the Eiffel Tower, where shops and restaurants abound, for a banquet and a group photo. The photographer's "Watch the birdie"—in French, "*Un oiseau va sortir*" ("A bird is about to come out [of the camera]")—is the signal for the surreal juxtapositions to begin. Among the creatures that emerge from the giant prop camera onstage are an ostrich, a lion, a dove, a bathing beauty, and a big fat boy who massacres the wedding party with ping-pong balls and steals their banquet food, some of which he proceeds to feed to the Tower itself. Of course the wedding party recovers from being murdered, and sells its group photo to an art dealer for a fantastic sum.

The special combination of impossible (surreal) and ordinary (lifestyle) components is cemented by a music similarly pervaded by everyday "lifestyle" genres and "surreal" polytonal harmonies. The camera from which animate objects materialize unpredictably was a device, Cocteau wrote, to "extricate objects and feelings from their veils and their mists, to show them suddenly, so naked and so alive that one can scarcely recognize them."[18] Tailleferre's *Quadrille*, whose five tiny sections put five such sudden manifestations together in a collage, best matches its sounds to the effect described by Cocteau. An old-fashioned suite of ballroom dances, it accompanies the antics of a detachment of the *Garde républicaine* who show up after the massacre. They arrest the big boy not for murder but for feeding the Tower outside of feeding time. Then the ostrich is found sleeping in the elevator; the photographer puts a hat on its head, rendering it invisible, and pushes it back through the camera.

As for Virgil Thomson, his Paris years were devoted to translating this French musical surrealism, which incorporated so many faux-Americanisms, back into the authentic American vernacular. The expatriate cohort to which he belonged, a group that included such novelists as F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940) and Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961), and whose major theme was postwar disillusion (or the apathetic frivolity born of it), is often called the "lost generation." The name was invented by Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), an American writer and arts patron who lived in Paris from 1903 until her death, and who maintained a celebrated salon at her home on the Rue des Fleurus that became the informal headquarters of the whole American expatriate arts community. Thomson and Stein, who had attended Radcliffe, Harvard's women's college, hit it off famously ("like Harvard men,"[19] the composer recalled), and the two of them collaborated on an opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, that, in terms of its impact on contemporary audiences and their consciousness of modern art, has to be regarded as the principal or "classic" text of musical surrealism.

Notes:

(17) Virgil Thomson, "French Music Here" (1941); *A Virgil Thomson Reader*, ed. John Rockwell (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), pp. 207–8.

(18) Jean Cocteau, *Les mariés de la Tour Eiffel* (1923); quoted in Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, p. 280.

(19) Virgil Thomson, *Virgil Thomson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 89.

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Virgil Thomson

Collage in music

FINDING ONESELF

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The watchword remained collage, in many dimensions: within the text, within the music, and in the relationship of text and music. Having worked at Harvard with the famous psychologist William James, who studied the unconscious mind, Stein was interested in aspects of what is sometimes, erroneously, called "automatic writing"—a style (or method) based on free association that violates norms of semantics, syntax, and grammar while relying on phonic and rhythmic play like puns and jingles to achieve emotional epiphanies ("moments of consciousness,"[20] she called them) independent of time and memory.

This already recalls Thomson's praise of contemporary French music (particularly Satie's) as being music that can be fully understood and enjoyed without knowledge of history. It also recalls the "Surrealist Manifesto" (1924) by André Breton (1896–1966), a French writer who set himself up as the movement's theorist, and who defined surrealism as "pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally or in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought; dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic and moral preoccupation."[21]

What a true surrealist strove for, Breton insisted, was irreducible and uninterpretable images that could not serve as metaphors, and impossible equations that could be formed by suppressing the word "like" in a simile. Thus, as Daniel Albright remarks, the phrase "breast of crystal"[22] is surrealist only "until somebody comes along to decipher it as a carafe"; and while "a tomato is like a child's balloon" could never qualify as surrealist, "tomato is balloon" does, excellently. "To exhaust the permutations of verbal propositions in the form $x = y$ is to reduce the universe to its essential blobbiness"[23] (or what William James called the "buzzing, blooming confusion"[24] of unmediated reality), minus the illusions of order that our critical faculties insist on imposing on our consciousness.

Now compare Stein on the subject of Susie Asado, a flamenco dancer:

- Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.
- Susie Asado.
- Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.
- Susie Asado.
- Susie Asado which is a told tray sure. A lean on the shoe this means
- slips slips hers. When the ancient light grey is clean it is yellow, it is a silver seller.
- This is a please this is a please there are the saids to jelly. These are
- the wets these say the sets to leave a crown to Incy.
- Incy is short for incubus.
- A pot. A pot is a beginning for a rare bit of trees. Trees tremble, the
- old vats are in bobbles, bobbles which shade and shed and render
- clean, render clean must. Drink pups.
- Drink pups drink pups lease a sash hold, see it shine and a bobolink
- has pins it shows a nail. What is a nail. A nail is unison.
- Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.

Writing like this, with its purely sonic associations (*there are the saids/these say the sets; clean must/Drink pups*), its stutters (*A pot A pot; trees. Trees; bobbles, bobbles; render clean, render clean; Drink pups. Drink pups drink pups*), its puns (*Sweet tea = sweetie*) and its controlling rhythms (e.g., the flamenco hemiola pattern: *A lean on the shoe this means slips slips hers* = ˇ/ˇˇˇˇˇ/- - -/) is clearly borrowing a great deal of its "structure" from music, and letting that serve in place of the usual semantic meaning in evoking the imagery promised by the title. What can music add? Ex. 10-11 shows what Thomson thought it could. His first setting of words by Stein, it dates from 1926.

ex. 10-11 Virgil Thomson, *Susie Asado,* beginning

The voice part, meticulously modeled on the rhythms and cadences of conversational English, is little more than a medium for the words, or perhaps a kind of incantation or chant. Thomson, who was just as interested as Stein in the interplay of sound and meaning (or in possibilities arising from the substitution of the one for the other) thought this minimalist approach not only necessary but a heaven-sent opportunity to test his ideas. "My theory," he wrote later,

was that if a text is set correctly for the sound of it, the meaning will take care of itself. And the Stein texts, for prosodizing in this way, were manna. With meanings already abstracted, or absent, or so multiplied that choice among them was impossible, there was no temptation toward tonal illustration, say of birdie babbling by the brook. You could make a setting for sound and syntax only, then add, if needed, an accompaniment equally functional.[25]

The remark about the birdie and the brook is reminiscent of the surrealist ban on metaphor and simile. Everything is itself only; and at the same time everything equals everything else with no comparison necessary. The music may pursue a semantically parallel rather than subservient path, and all will come out right in the end. Thus Thomson's accompaniment is not merely "functional," but a collage in its own right, a bag of basic musical elements—diatonic arpeggios and scales—that not only holds aloof from the meaning of the text (no flamenco rhythms!), but maintains a freedom of syntax just as daring, in its homely way, as Stein's: the first combination of voice and piano is in blatant harmonic contradiction; the scales move in parallel sevenths or ninths; there is not a single "functional" harmony, or even a full triad. Did Thomson, writing it, think of Gertrude Stein's disclosure that "I like to improvise on a piano I like to play sonatinas followed by another always on the white keys I do not like black keys and never two notes struck by the same hand at the same time because I do not like chords"?[26]

Thomson's second Stein setting, *Capital Capitals* (1927), a little cantata for four men's voices (two tenors, baritone, and bass) and piano, also avoids "harmony" like a plague. The voices take turns in dialogue; they are never once combined. The long text ostensibly consists of a conversation about and among the four capital cities (Aix, Arles, Avignon, and Les Beaux) of ancient Provence. Only four times in fifteen minutes are full triads heard; and when they are, they are deployed in the most hackneyed school-exercise fashion, to accompany (or rather mock) the occurrence of "affective" words like "tenderness." Ex. 10-12a shows the first such passage, which comes on the fourteenth page of the thirty-four-page score.

Far more typical is the opening, a little prologue sung by the baritone before the dialogue as such begins (Ex. 10-12b). The monotonous note-repetitions give a whiff of plainchant, confirmed by the tonally impossible (but "modally" ordinary) cadence in the fourth bar. Thus, if Stravinsky's "neoclassic" manner bracketed off the nineteenth century as a sort of historical wrong turn, Thomson's "neomedieval" manner here brackets off almost the entire history of music, as if to confirm his remark about the possibility, and (one must infer) the desirability, proved by Satie, of composing a new music that required no historical knowledge for its full comprehension and enjoyment. Composing in defiance of history meant composing in defiance of Germany, the land not only of history but of "historicism" as well.

ex. 10-12a Virgil Thomson, *Capital Capitals*, "Cannot express can express tenderness"

ex. 10-12b Virgil Thomson, *Capital Capitals*, opening baritone solo

The opera, on which Thomson began working in 1927 but did not orchestrate until its premiere had been arranged some six years later, actually had four acts, not three, and many more than four saints, although the main character is the great sixteenth-century mystic, Saint Theresa of Avila. When staged, the opera has action; but that is entirely the director's business. For Stein, "anything that was not a story could be a play," for a play dealt not with the narration of events, but with "the essence of what happened."[27] And that, she said, is why she chose saints as her subject: "A saint a real saint never does anything, a martyr does something but a really good saint does nothing, and so I wanted to have Four Saints who did nothing and I wrote the Four Saints in Three Acts and they did nothing and that was everything."[28] A play, she further explained (in a fashion that would have pleased André Breton), is a landscape.

That is not quite the paradox it seems. A landscape exists as a temporal constant, not a sequence or progression; so does heaven, where the saints live; and so does *Four Saints in Three Acts.* It has what the literary critic Joseph Frank christened "spatial form" in a famous essay of 1945, whereby "the time-flow of the narrative [or representation] is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the immobilized time-area."[29] Without using the word (for he is discussing literature rather than painting), he is nevertheless describing collage. Authors like James Joyce and Marcel Proust, in Frank's interpretation, subverted the "linearity" of literature through what amounted to collage techniques. So did Gertrude Stein; and so, in his music, did Thomson.

Among the things "collaged" in Stein's text were the cast of characters, the words (often unassigned to any character in particular), the stage directions, and the scene headings (often nonconsecutive or repetitive). Thomson had no choice but to set it all to music without discrimination, as one can see from the brief last act, "Saints in Heaven" (Ex. 10-13). His creative method, as he described it in his autobiography, was as "automatic" as Stein's:

> With the text on my piano's music rack, I would sing and play, improvising melody to fit the words and harmony for underpinning them with shape. I did this every day, writing down nothing. When the first act would improvise itself every day in the same way, I knew it was set. [30]

fig. 10-4 Virgil Thomson and Gertude Stein with the score of *Four Saints in Three Acts.*

ex. 10-13 Virgil Thomson, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, IV, intermezzo

The Intermezzo that precedes the act is like the accompaniment to *Susie Asado* without the words: a collage of chords, arpeggios, and scales; and also, at times, a collage of keys in the surrealist polydiatonic ("polytonal") mode. The sung music continues in this vein, albeit with a few recurrent vocal phrases for Commère and Compère (Mom and Pop, "characters" invented by Thomson to act as masters of ceremonies) that give a semblance of thematic melody. John Cage, in a critical study of Thomson's music, wisely pointed out that the best one could do by way of analyzing the score of *Four Saints in Three Acts* was to cite statistics. "There are 111 tonic-dominants, 178 scale passages, 632 sequences, 38 references to nursery tunes, and one to 'My Country, 'Tis of Thee.'"[31] This is noted in mock-sorrow, as evidence that "the materials of music, in contrast to those of poetry, are becoming impoverished." More seriously critical, perhaps, is the observation that "where the text darts about in unpredictable directions, the accompaniment is merely repetitive, rarely more than linear, monophonic, and harmonic."

But that is Thomson's way, reminiscent of Poulenc's, of offering the text an appropriate "countercollage." Stein's fantastic imagery is countered and anchored, given shape, by Thomson's deliberately plain and unprepossessing music, so that (as Cage shrewdly notes) "the matter-of-fact and the irrational are one." Indeed, Cage might have added (if perhaps still disapprovingly) that when the saints finally get singing, as they do in Ex. 10-13, the music refers openly—and ecstatically—to the idiom of American Protestant

(Southern Baptist) hymns, the commonplace musical vernacular of the Kansas City–born composer's own youthful environment. That finally insures that the idiom of the opera will strike listeners—American listeners, anyway—as genuinely *sur-realistic*. And it resonates poignantly with Thomson's typically "lost generation" recollection that "I wrote in Paris music that was always, in one way or another, about Kansas City."[32]

The ultimate effect of Thomson's surrealism, then, was that of finding oneself, the reassurance any member of a lost generation craves. And that may be the ultimate message (or better, the ultimate massage) that surrealist collage offered the wounded psyches of postwar Europeans and Americans. "If there is one theme that dominates the history of modern culture since the last quarter of the nineteenth century," wrote Joseph Frank with forgivable exaggeration at the end of another World War, "it is precisely that of insecurity, instability, the feeling of loss of control over the meaning and purpose of life amidst the continuing triumphs of science and technics."[33] In the face of reason run amok, the best consolation art could offer was that of irrational acceptance and faith, which, not at all coincidentally, is the only way one can make head or tail of a surrealist collage.

Virgil Thomson spelled it all out when he exhorted listeners, in a note accompanying the first recording of excerpts from *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1947), not "to construe the words of this opera literally or seek in it any abstruse symbolism."[34] Instead, he wrote, "If by means of the poet's liberties with logic and the composer's constant use of the simplest elements in our musical vernacular, something is here evoked of the childlike gaiety and mystical strength of lives devoted in common to a non-materialistic end, the authors will consider their message to have been communicated."

To spell it out in the theater, Thomson cast the original production exclusively for African-American singers, even though, as he freely acknowledged, his work "had nothing whatever to do with Negro life,"[35] and even though the audience to which the work was addressed was unequivocally white and affluent. The implied equation of a Black American sensibility with "childlike gaiety and mystical strength" obviously played into the audience's racial prejudices; its contribution to the work's chic success (a sixty-performance run in a Broadway theater in the season of 1934–1935, unprecedented and rarely paralleled thereafter in the annals of American opera), can only seem in retrospect a fairly cynical calculation, despite Thomson's later protestation that he had chosen the singers "purely for beauty of voice, clarity of enunciation, and fine carriage."[36] But the commercial ploys that went into the casting were not a part of the work's conception, as is evident from the musical style, which refers not to any African-American idiom, but to that of the composer's own upbringing. The irony was that he had to go abroad to discover his American roots. He was not alone.

Notes:

(20) *The Columbia Encyclopedia* (6th ed.; New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 2710.

(21) André Breton, "Surrealist Manifesto" (1924), in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 26.

(22) Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, p. 268.

(23) *Ibid*., p. 269.

(24) William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt, 1890).

(25) Thomson, *Virgil Thomson*, p. 90.

(26) Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*; quoted in Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, p. 322.

(27) Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 119.

(28) Quoted in Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, p. 328.

(29) Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," in J. Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p. 17.

(30) Thomson, *Virgil Thomson*, p. 104.

(31) Kathleen Hoover and John Cage, *Virgil Thomson: His Life and Music* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), p. 157.

(32) Virgil Thomson, program note for *The Seine at Night* (1947); quoted in Kathleen Hoover and John Cage, *Virgil Thomson: His Life and Music* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), p. 108.

(33) Frank, "Spatial Form," p. 58.

(34) Liner note to RCA Victor DM-1244 (released 1948); quoting a radio talk given in 1942.

(35) Virgil Thomson, "About 'Four Saints,'" liner note to Nonesuch Records 79035−1 X (1982).

(36) *Ibid.*

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 11 In Search of the "Real" America

European "Jazz"; Gershwin; Copland; The American "Symphonists"

Chapter: CHAPTER 11 In Search of the "Real" America
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

AMERICANS IN PARIS, PARISIANS IN AMERICA

A new chapter in the history of American concert music—of musical "Americanism"—was opened by the generation of composers who, like Virgil Thomson, received their "finishing" in Paris in the 1920s, so often under the tutelage of Nadia Boulanger that their cohort is often called the "Boulangerie," French for bakery. They formed their musical tastes in the period of anti-Germanic backlash that followed World War I, which made them susceptible to the neoclassical and Dada/surrealist currents that dominated in the French capital. But the Parisian atmosphere in which they were coming of age was already seething with "Americanism," and it was this Americanized Paris that brought the new generation of American composers their vision of America. It was one of the characteristic ironies of the time that it should have taken a Parisian apprenticeship to create a viable "American school."

We have already noted the gusto with which the French were then consuming what a shrewd New York journalist, writing in 1925, called "the dance music that the Old World has called American jazz." A harbinger had been Debussy's *Children's Corner* (1908), a suite for piano dedicated to his little daughter Claude-Emma (Chouchou), which ends with "Golliwog's Cakewalk," a piece inspired by her little blackface doll. Cakewalks, strutting dances popularized in blackface minstrel shows, had been known in Europe since the turn of the century. Debussy's is a double parody: of the syncopated blackface dance itself in the outer sections, and of that perennial dartboard, Wagner's *Tristan*, in the middle (Ex. 11-1).

Beginning with the Cocteau-Satie *Parade*, which dates from 1917, the year the United States entered the Great War, a more up-to-date Americanism had begun to infiltrate Parisian concert and theatrical music. It was then that the term "jazz" gradually began showing up in European writings to designate what had formerly been known as ragtime. The etymology of the word and its American origins are obscure: David Schiff sums a complex and thorny matter up when he writes that "the term 'jazz,' first applied around 1916 (in New Orleans) to a rough and sexy strain of African-American music, soon became synonymous with any syncopated mass-marketed popular music."[1]

In 1918 Stravinsky, the greatest trendsetter of the day, wrote two pieces called "ragtime." One (already mentioned in chapter 8) was the last in a suite of three dances (after a tango and a waltz) from a wartime traveling show called *The Soldier's Tale* (*Histoire du soldat*), in which a Russian folktale was somewhat surrealistically updated with contemporary popular music played by an imitation village band consisting of two strings (violin and double bass), two winds (clarinet and bassoon), and two brass (trumpet and trombone), plus percussion. The other piece, called *Rag-time pour onze instruments* ("Ragtime for eleven instruments"), was scored for the same ensemble (minus the bassoon) plus a flute, a horn, a second violin, a viola, and a Hungarian dulcimer or cimbalom. It was finished on 10 November 1918, the very day of the German surrender; the manuscript carries the triumphant notation, *Jour de delivrance. Messieurs les Allemands ont capitulé* ("Day of deliverance; the esteemed Germans have capitulated").

ex. 11-1a Claude Debussy, "Golliwog's Cakewalk," mm. 1–17

That coincidence neatly symbolized one of the main attractions of American popular genres for the European allies (and also for left-wing "protest music" in Weimar Germany): it was as un-"*boche*" as music could get. That much was already evident in Debussy's double parody. But it received an enormous boost during the war, and was further enhanced in the war's wake by eye- (or ear-) witness contact. The Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet, the *chef d'orchestre* for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and one of Stravinsky's closest friends, wrote back to the Russian composer from America, where the company was touring in 1916, that whereas the American classical-music establishment was hopelessly dominated by Germans (and, he added regrettably, by Jews), nevertheless

> there is at the bottom of this immense country a forgotten or lost soul which has found its way into the *incredible music* you hear in cafes!! And the absence of traditions has forced this people—in their towns, their bridges, their machines—to improvise splendidly and with genius. These two elements are very close to us; they are precisely what we like, and what your work has revealed in Europe. To free this country from the boche imprint, reveal it to itself, and teach it that it belongs with us—and at the same time to take on this wonderful field of activity—would be a fine dream.[2]

ex. 11-1b Claude Debussy, "Golliwogs Cakewalk," mm. 61–73

Beginning immediately after the war, American popular musicians, many of them African-American, brought their music to Europe and, as Ansermet might have predicted, were lionized in all the allied capitals, but especially by "progressive" musicians in Paris. Some, like the clarinettist Sidney Bechet (1897–1959), came for frequent lucrative tours. Ansermet heard Bechet play in London in 1919 and proclaimed him "an artist of genius."[3] The Swiss conductor's account of the music Bechet played, with an ensemble called the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, shows, perhaps for the first time (as the jazz historian Robert Walser puts it), "a 'serious' musician taking jazz seriously."[4] Ansermet respected what he heard enough to attempt a technical description of it, especially its qualities of rhythm and "modality":

> The desire to give certain syllables a particular emphasis or a prolonged resonance, that is to say preoccupations of an expressive order, seem to have determined in negro singing their anticipation or delay of a fraction of rhythmic unity. This is the birth of syncopation. All the traditional negro songs are strewn with syncopes which issue from the voice while the movement of the body marks regular

rhythm....

In the field of melody, although his habituation to our scales has effaced the memory of the African modes, an old instinct pushes the negro to pursue his pleasure outside the orthodox intervals: he performs thirds which are neither major nor minor and false seconds, and falls often by instinct on the natural harmonic sounds of a given note—it is here especially that no written music can give the idea of his playing.[5]

Other Americans, like the singer Josephine Baker (1906–75), went to Paris to stay. Having originally come over in 1925 to star in a show called *La revue nègre* at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées (the very hall where, a dozen years earlier, *The Rite of Spring* had had its stormy premiere), she quickly moved over to the Folies-Bergère, the number-one Paris nightspot or "music hall," became the darling of café society, posed for Picasso, opened her own nightclub, became wealthy, and never went back, becoming a French citizen in 1937. Her success was an inspiration to many African-Americans, and in later life Baker was one of the early icons of the American civil rights movement.

A few Europeans even got acquainted, in the early postwar years, with genuine early American jazz at its source. Milhaud was one. Touring America in 1922, he frequented Harlem nightclubs, and "speakeasies" (illicit clubs where alcoholic beverages were served during Prohibition) in New York and Boston, and caused some consternation when he told reporters that European "serious" music was being influenced by American jazz. His memoirs contain a vivid description of what he heard and its invigorating impact:

Harlem had not yet been discovered by the snobs and aesthetes: we [Milhaud and the singer Yvonne George] were the only white folk there. The music I heard was absolutely different from anything I had ever heard before and was a revelation to me. Against the beat of the drums the melodic lines crisscrossed in a breathless pattern of broken and twisted rhythms. A Negress whose grating voice seemed to come from the depths of the centuries sang in front of the various tables. With despairing pathos and dramatic feeling she sang over and over again, to the point of exhaustion, the same refrain, to which the constantly changing melodic pattern of the orchestra wove a kaleidoscopic background. This authentic music had its roots in the darkest corners of the Negro soul, the vestigial traces of Africa, no doubt. Its effect on me was so overwhelming that I could not tear myself away. From then on I frequented other Negro theaters and dance halls. In some of their shows the singers were accompanied by a flute, a clarinet, two trumpets, a trombone, a complicated percussion section played by one man, a piano, and a string quintet ....

As I never missed the slightest opportunity of visiting Harlem, I persuaded my friends to accompany me, as well as [the Italian composer Alfredo] Casella and [the Dutch conductor Willem] Mengelberg, who were in New York at the time. When I went back to France, I never wearied of playing over and over, on a little portable phonograph shaped like a camera, the Black Swan records I had purchased in a little shop in Harlem. More than ever I was resolved to use jazz for a chamber work.[6]

What eventually emerged from this experience was not the envisioned chamber work but a ballet, *La création du monde* (1923), composed to a scenario by Blaise Cendrars, the surrealist writer, who had traveled widely in China and Africa. It was scored for a small orchestra of seventeen soloists, including a piano, an alto saxophone, and "a complicated percussion section played by one man," like the one Milhaud heard in New York (or, for that matter, like the one Stravinsky employed in *The Soldier's Tale*). The action, based (according to Cendrars) on authentic African mythology, showed first a seething mass of weirdly costumed dancers representing the primal soup from which life would gradually erupt. The section sampled in Ex. 11-2 accompanies the beginning of that process: the inchoate living mass boils in a heaving motion—projections appear—trees shoot up, drop leaves that sprout into prehistoric animals—human forms begin to show (a torso, a great leg, etc.).

ex. 11-2 Darius Milhaud, *La création du monde*, jazz fugue, beginning

Milhaud's music takes the form of a fugue on a subject that embodies a stereotyped jazz "riff" or repeated figure reminiscent of Ansermet's description of "thirds which are neither major nor minor" in its unstable oscillations between F(E♯) and F♯ relative to D as first given out by the bass (later G(Fx) and G♯ relative to E, C(B♯) and C♯ relative to A, etc.) A rapid-fire riff in sixteenth notes first introduced as a countersubject may have been a deliberate quotation from Euday Bowman's "Twelfth Street Rag" (1916), a dance hall favorite of the day (Ex. 11-3).

ex. 11-3 Riff figure from Milhaud's *La création du monde* compared with *12th Street Rag*

Significantly, the prelude that precedes this fugue (played as overture before the curtain is raised), is composed, despite the "jazz band" scoring and occasional syncopated riffs, in a sedately Bachian "chorale-prelude" style. This provides a suitably religious frame for the action to follow, drawing parallels between the African creation myth and the "Western" or biblical one—but also drawing parallels between the new neoprimitivism based on African-American music and other forms of Parisian neoclassicism.

That parallelism was enthusiastically pursued by Maurice Ravel in several of his late works. One was an opera: a *fantaisie lyrique* called *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (*The Child and the Magic Spells*, 1925) to a libretto by the French novelist Colette (1873–1954), who had in her youth appeared on the music-hall stage. A few of the magical apparitions of the title, in particular a foxtrot sung and danced by a teapot and teacup, drew on

popular-music idioms for surrealistic effect. (A foxtrot was a slow ragtime dance done with a gliding step, introduced by the team of Vernon and Irene Castle in 1914.) Ravel's most potent jazz stylizations, however, came in generically titled "classical" scores like his two piano concertos (in G, 1929–1931; in D for the left hand alone, 1929–1930) and his three-movement sonata for violin and piano (1923–1927).
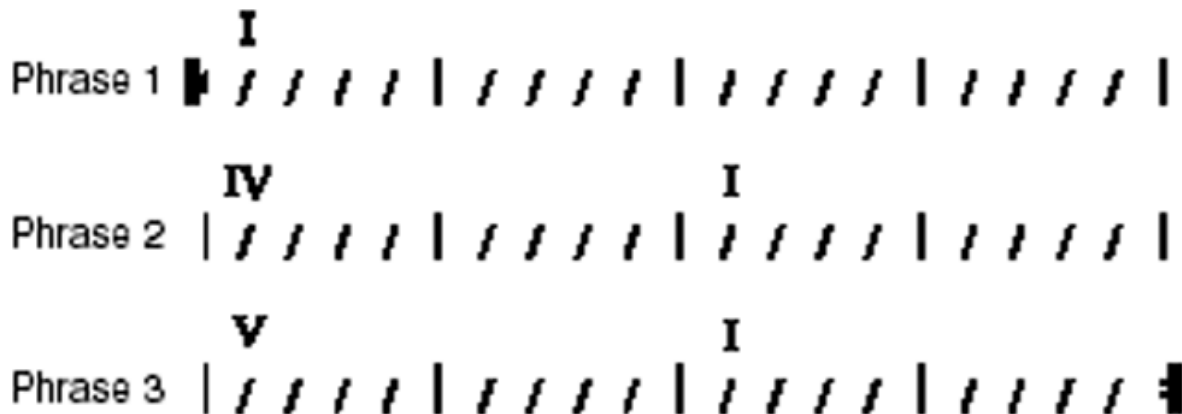
fig. 11-1 Basic harmonic structure of 12-bar blues.

The middle movement from the sonata, subtitled "Blues" and sketched in the summer of 1923, was Ravel's earliest essay in jazz effects. "Blues" (or "the blues") is a black-American folk genre that fed into the evolution of jazz around the time of the Great War. The name seems to stem from "the blue devils," a colloquial expression for melancholy or depression that can be traced as far back as Elizabethan English. As a musical term, "blues" can refer generally to a style of expressive performance as well as specifically to a musical form that seems to have been standardized around the turn of the century. As a form, the blues is a framework for poetic and melodic improvisation. The singer improvises three lines of poetry in which the second is a repetition of the first and the third ends with a word that rhymes with the ending-word of the other two. Each line coincides with a four-bar musical phrase in time. The first is supported by the tonic harmony throughout; the second moves from the subdominant (two bars) to the tonic (two bars), and the third is similarly divided between the dominant and the tonic. As a rule, the rhyming word coincides with the third downbeat of a phrase, the rest of the time being filled out by the instrumental accompaniment, usually on guitar or banjo. Fig. 11-1 shows the harmonic frame of a typical "12-bar blues" (each stroke within the measures representing the strummed beat), and Ex. 11-4 shows the opening stanza of *St. Louis Blues* (1914) by the African-American trumpeter and bandleader W. C. Handy (1873–1958), the most famous composed and published (i.e., commercial) example of what was a predominantly oral (folk or nonprofessional) genre.

ex. 11-4 W. C. Handy, *St. Louis Blues*, **first stanza**

The unstable third degree described by Ansermet and appropriated by Milhaud is conspicuous in Handy's melody, both in the opening melodic "scoop" notated (very approximately) by the use of a grace note, and in the B♭s (also notated approximately) that clash with the B-natural of the tonic triad as cross-relations both direct (in line 1) and oblique (in lines 2 and 3). A folk blues singer will sing these notes sharp, so that they lie "in the crack" between the minor and the major third, and will refer to them as "blue notes." (Also called blue notes are flattened leading tones and fifths, or any note that is "bent out of shape" for expressive purposes.) The characteristic jazz syncopation (also described by Ansermet), in which a long or accented note is made more intensely expressive by placing it ahead of the beat on which it is expected, is also present in Handy's melody, consistently placed at the end of the first measure in every line. (Again the notation gives an exact appearance—displacement by one eighth-note—to what in actual performance is flexible and diverse.)

Ravel's blues movement incorporates—or better, refers to—virtually every feature of blues style as just described, beginning with the twanging pizzicato chords that cast the violin as ersatz banjo, plunking out the rhythmic framework against which the melody will be "improvised" (Ex. 11-5a). The chords are the expected I, IV, and V, although the standard blues pattern is merely suggested, not reproduced. But to score-readers (as opposed to listeners), the clash that occurs at the piano's entrance is implicit from the start in the "bitonal" superimposition of key signatures.

ex. 11-5a Maurice Ravel, Violin Sonata, II ("Blues"), mm. 1–27

The reason for enclosing the technical term in quotes should be evident if one recalls the nature of a "blue note," poised somewhere between the major and the minor third. The clash of harmonic roots when the piano enters casts the throbbing B-natural at the top of the violin chord simultaneously as major third above G and (in the guise of C♭) as minor third above A♭. The whole G-major triad, transferred at 1 from the violin to the piano, becomes in effect an implicit appoggiatura; never resolving, it is effectively colored "blue."

Ravel's sophisticated harmonic pun reverses the normal perspective of a blue note: what is ordinarily pitched outside the tempered scale relative to a stable root is pitched stably relative to two competing (hence destabilized) roots. It is the texture at 1 rather than a cadence that establishes A♭ after all, as the functional tonic. The method whereby a distinctive trait is appropriated from an oral tradition to become a device for achieving the renovation of a literate style is reminiscent of the way in which Stravinsky had employed Russian folk music in his early ballets. When the material so deployed is "native," the technique is called "neonationalism." Ravel's adaptation, by analogy, might well be termed "neo-exoticism." Once the violinist picks up the bow and reenters as the "melodist" (the key signature having been appropriately adjusted and

the mood identified as "nostalgic"), the solo part is fashioned to give the effect of a blues improvisation on the Handy model. The characteristic blues syncopation, with small note-values tied over the beat to longer ones, becomes the rule; harmonic thirds, fifths, and sevenths constantly waver; that wavering is extended to ever wider melodic intervals by explicitly notated *portamenti* (finger slides) of a kind that was just then going out of style in "classical" playing under the impact of the New Sobriety. (And that might be one of the reasons why Ravel, who grew up with the sliding technique, labeled the portamento-heavy violin solo "nostalgic.")

As the movement nears its climax (Ex. 11-5b), the violin part reverts to an even more plainly indicated banjoistic style, while the piano takes over the portamento wailing as best it can. In the coda (Ex. 11-5c), the two instruments divide the "vocal" line in a sort of hocket; five measures before the end Ravel comes up with a devilishly clever portamento effect for the pianist (second finger literally sliding from black key to white under a tone sustained by the third finger) that could only be put into effect at this point, where the dynamics were soft and the line unaccompanied. The last chord contains another sort of "blue note" in the form of an unresolving, stable seventh that was the stereotyped "jazz" finishing chord. (Its origin was a tag-line, "Good evening, friends," that coincided with the first four notes of the equally stereotypical fugue subject in Ex. 11-2, from Milhaud's *Création du monde*.) Ravel described his "blues" movement to an American audience during his single visit to the United States, a concert tour of 1928. Speaking at the Rice Institute (now Rice University) in Houston, Ravel called attention to his "neo-exotic" technique, or what he called "minute stylization in the manipulation" of "popular forms." The manner in which such stylization is accomplished follows the predilection of the individual composer, Ravel maintained, so that his blues, while based on an American model, "is nevertheless French music, Ravel's music." He elaborated the point by reminding his audience that composers of at least four different nationalities—his French compatriot Milhaud, the Russian Stravinsky, the Italian Casella, and the German Hindemith—had all accomplished "minute stylizations"[7] of American popular music, "while the styles become as numerous as the composers themselves." And this is because "the individualities of these composers are stronger than the materials appropriated."

And yet this did not stop Ravel from turning right around and advising his audience that his neo-exoticist technique, if practiced by Americans, would be ipso facto transformed into a neonationalist one that would at last vouchsafe the emergence of "a veritable school of American music." Acknowledging (or perhaps insisting) that "Negro music is not of purely American origin" (a fact that many European compositions —notably *La création du monde*—also implicitly alleged), Ravel closed by reiterating his belief that

> it will prove to be an effective factor in the founding of an American school of music. At all events, may this national American music of yours embody a great deal of the rich and diverting rhythm of your jazz, a great deal of the emotional expression of your blues, and a great deal of the sentiment and spirit of your popular melodies and songs, worthily deriving from, and in turn contributing to, a noble national heritage in music.

ex. 11-5b Maurice Ravel, Violin Sonata, II ("Blues"), mm. 95−100

Ravel's prescription is reminiscent of Dvořák's, some thirty years before; and like its predecessor it begs many questions that were of far greater moment to Americans than they were to Europeans, for whom America was an exotic and still somewhat mythical place. Leaving entirely aside for the moment the highly fraught question of its origins, and granting that jazz (or "jazz") was a distinctively American genre, did that enable it (or entitle it) to represent the diverse population of the United States? Could the music of a minority culture, and an oft-despised one at that, reflect the (often bigoted) majority? Could it even be said that America, as such, had a folk music? And could jazz, a genre that had developed since Dvořák's time and that had (especially in the forms that Europeans knew) long since been "commodified" and commercialized, qualify as folklore? What surely seemed to Ravel a benign (or in any case an innocuous) suggestion led to endless controversy as soon as Americans began taking it up.

ex. 11-5c Maurice Ravel, Violin Sonata, II ("Blues"), end

And was Ravel's suggestion even all that benign? Or did it still reflect the Old World condescension that many had detected in Dvořák's equally well meaning advice? European enthusiasm for jazz did not entirely efface traditional condescension toward its practitioners. Josephine Baker was surely correct in asserting that black Americans lucky enough to find work there could better escape prejudice and discrimination in Europe than they could at home. (She backed up the point in 1951 when, on a visit to America, she confronted the Stork Club, New York's most exclusive nightclub, over its racist policies that made it impossible for her, a European celebrity, to obtain service there, even as the club featured many black performers.) And yet her European reputation was won through her willingness to represent herself as an exotic, neoprimitive sex object on terms that might seem degrading now (Fig. 11-2a).

Or consider the illustration that graced the cover of the program book for the "Saison Music-Hall" at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in 1925, when Baker made her Parisian début. The pit musicians—thick lips smiling, eyes rolling—are depicted in a style that differed little from the demeaning "Sambo" image common in the States (Fig. 11-2b). The French tendency to associate Negro music with Africa, moreover, although it resonates with the "black nationalism" of a later time, had rather different implications in a country that, as of the 1920s, was still a major colonial power.

Even Ernest Ansermet's rapturous review of Sidney Bechet and the Southern Syncopated Orchestra had a less than judicious side. Having admired jazz melody and rhythm, Ansermet deemed it fitting to temper his remarks with the observation that

fig. 11-2 (left) Josephine Baker, poster for Casino de Paris. (right) Program for "Saison Music-Hall" at t Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, Paris, 1925.

> It is only in the field of harmony that the negro hasn't yet created his own distinct expression. Even here, he uses a succession of seventh chords, and ambiguous major-minors with a deftness which many Europeans should envy. But, in general, harmony is perhaps a musical element which appears in the scheme of musical evolution only at a stage which the negro art has not yet attained. **8**

The assumption that the world's cultures and civilizations were all located on a single evolutionary timetable, with Europe out in front, was of course the principle that undergirded and justified Europe's colonial expansion and all its attendant cruelties. Ansermet compounds the colonialist impression with a wishful prediction not unlike Ravel's. Both seem to imply that it will be left to the white Europeans (or the Euro-Americans) to exploit "the negro's" musical resources to the full; and this puts a somewhat different complexion on the Satiean and Stravinskian appropriations that were already taking place by the time Ansermet made his forecast, and even on Ravel's wonderful "minute stylization." Sidney Bechet's true significance, Ansermet suggests, will ultimately be that of forerunner to the more sophisticated talents of the future:

> When one has tried so often to find in the past one of those figures to whom we owe the creation of our art as we know it today—those men of the 17th and 18th centuries, for example, who wrote the expressive works of dance airs which cleared the way for Haydn and Mozart—what a moving thing it is to meet this black. fat bov with white teeth and narrow forehead. who is verv glad one likes what he

does, but can say nothing of his art, except that he follows his "own way"—and then one considers that perhaps his "own way" is the highway along which the whole world will swing tomorrow.⁹

Notes:

(1) David Schiff, *Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 83; increasingly accepted among scholars is an etymology relating the term to "jizz," an African-American slang word for seminal ejaculate.

(2) Quoted in Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring: Russia and France, 1882–1934* (New York: Knopf, 1999), p. 264.

(3) Ansermet, "Sur un Orchestre Nègre" (1919); Robert Walser, ed., *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 11.

(4) Walser, *Keeping Time*, p. 9.

(5) Ansermet, "Sur un Orchestre Négre"; *Keeping Time*, pp. 10–11.

(6) Darius Milhaud, *Notes without Music*, trans. Donald Evans (New York: Knopf, 1953), pp. 136–37.

(7) Maurice Ravel, "Contemporary Music," in *The Rice Institute Pamphlets*, Vol. XV (1928); P. Weiss and R. Taruskin, *Music in the Western World*, 2nd ed., pp. 407–8.

(8) Ansermet, "Sur un Orchestre Nègre"; *Keeping Time*, p. 11.

(9) *Ibid*.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Aaron Copland

Serge Koussevitzky

Daniel Gregory Mason

TRANSGRESSION

Chapter: CHAPTER 11 In Search of the "Real" America
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

So it might be best not to romanticize the European reception of American popular music after the Great War, or to suppose that it indicates any real change in the Old World's attitude toward the culture of the New (let alone belief in the equality of races). In any case it was a very temporary fling; by 1927 Milhaud flatly asserted that there was not a single composer in Europe still interested in American jazz. It was only a minor exaggeration.

Within America the incorporation of "jazz" or popular dance idioms into concert genres, although it was not an entirely new idea, actually became newly controversial in the postwar decade. The most prominent previous exponent of the style, Henry F. Gilbert (1868–1928), was an omnivorous purveyor of exotic Americana after Dvořák's prescription. His *Negro Episode* for orchestra (1896), *Comedy Overture on Negro Themes* (1906, to an opera, *Uncle Remus*, after the ersatz Negro folktales of Joel Chandler Harris), and *The Dance in Place Congo*, a symphonic poem (1908) that was later adapted as a ballet and performed by the Metropolitan Opera Company (1918), took their place in his work list alongside an orchestral suite called *The Intimate Story of Indian Tribal Life; or, The Story of a Vanishing Race* and other "Indianist" compositions, and also alongside several suites of incidental music in an Irish style to accompany plays by W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge. As for Charles Ives's ragtime "stylizations" (see chapter 5), they remained virtually unknown before Ives's belated "discovery" in the late 1930s.

It was only in the 1920s that jazz or popular idioms became associated with an American music that was overtly "modernist" in style, and thus acquired a challenging or threatening edge that could inspire hostility. The chief culprit was Aaron Copland (1900–90), like Virgil Thomson an early pupil of Nadia Boulanger. Copland was in fact the first American to join the Boulangerie, having noticed a magazine advertisement for a school the French government planned to set up in Fontainebleau, a Paris suburb, for American musicians in the summer of 1921—"a gesture of appreciation to America," as Copland recalled it, "for its friendship during World War I."[10] Nadia Boulanger was on the staff as a teacher of harmony, not composition. She proved, however, to be the one member of the faculty sympathetic to the modernist music Copland wanted to write; and it was her open-mindedness that gave him the courage to experiment, eventually, with what was then called "symphonic jazz." Copland himself associated his serious interest in jazz with an experience he had not in America but in Vienna, during a brief vacation in 1923, while he was studying in Paris. "Defamiliarization" by a foreign environment played a part in awakening that new sympathy: "When I heard jazz played in Vienna, it was like hearing it for the first time," Copland wrote.[11] Even more decisive, though, was Copland's discovery—a discovery that astonished him—that cultured Europeans, unlike their American counterparts, regarded jazz with high respect.

fig. 11-3 Aaron Copland with the composer Irving Fine (1914–1962) at Brandeis University, 1961.

Even before going to Europe, Copland had written one perky little piano piece (called "Jazzy") in a popular style, but had kept it hidden from his early composition teacher in New York, a former Dvořák pupil named Rubin Goldmark (1872–1936), whose uncle, Karl Goldmark (1830–1915), had been Vienna's leading opera composer at the turn of the century. Goldmark maintained Dvořák's advocacy of an "Americanist" idiom for American concert music, had written a *Hiawatha* overture in 1900, and would even write a *Negro Rhapsody* in 1923; but the use of popular styles for this purpose was not an option he favored. Dvořák had called for the assimilation of American subject matter to "the beautiful forms of art," and the notion of "the beautiful" did not extend as far as the popular or the demotic in the social circles that then supported the cultivation of art music in America. In retrospect, of course, nothing is easier than to see in that esthetic distinction a covert class discrimination.

Not that Copland's amiable little "Jazzy" (Ex. 11-6) would have challenged it. But the music he wrote with

Boulanger's encouragement during his period of study in Paris (1921–24) had taken a defiant turn that reflected European modernist attitudes. A concert by the New York Symphony Orchestra on 11 January 1925 made the young composer notorious. Seeking to placate his audience after the premiere of Copland's *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* (a work commissioned by Boulanger for her American debut), the conductor, German-born Walter Damrosch (1862–1950), announced from the podium that "if a gifted young man can write a symphony like this at twenty-three [*sic*], within five years he will be ready to commit murder!"[12] Virgil Thomson opened the generational gap wide by calling Copland's symphony "the voice of America in our generation."[13] So when Copland began incorporating jazz elements into his compositions after the scandalous Symphony—and doing it, he said, precisely so as the more effectively and authentically to embody the generational voice to which Thomson had called attention—they were read not as an entertaining gesture or an attempt to ingratiate his music with his compatriots, but as something nearer the opposite.

ex. 11-6 Aaron Copland, "Jazzy" (1920)

The work that immediately followed the Symphony was a suite for small orchestra called *Music for the Theatre*, a sort of incidental score to an imaginary play. The ensemble is a typical theatrical (or "pit") orchestra: eighteen players (at a minimum), including piano. The scoring uses only single winds except for a pair of trumpets that already signals brashness. And indeed, the first movement starts right off (Ex. 11-7a) with a cheeky solo for the first trumpet to which the second adds a *Flatterzunge*—a "flutter-tongued" note—that was all too easily heard as an insult of a familiar New York variety (a "Bronx cheer," or "raspberry"). The Molto moderato that follows the introductory fanfares seems to draw in vague and general terms on a "blues" idiom. Its shifting metrical scheme and polytonal harmonic framework—chords "planed" or moved in parallel in two directions (Ex. 11-7b)—refer far more explicitly to the Parisian music (Milhaud, Stravinsky) that made up Copland's sonic environment during his formative years than to jazz. The most specific reference to blues, perhaps, is the syncopated repetitions in the oboe solo (Ex. 11-7c).

ex. 11-7a Aaron Copland *Music for the Theatre*, I, trumpet solo

The Subito Allegro molto at 5 reinstates the edgy trumpet fanfare motif as the main theme (first in the E♭ clarinet), a study in shifting accents against an ostinato accompaniment. The climax, Molto meno mosso at 11 (Ex. 11-7d), seems to be a calculated attempt at capturing the visceral impact of a certain device enthusiastically described by Ansermet in his review of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra: "When they indulge in one of their favorite effects, which is to take up the refrain of a dance in a tempo suddenly twice as slow and with redoubled intensity and figuration, a truly gripping thing takes place: it seems as if a great wind is passing over a forest or as if a door is suddenly opened on a wild orgy."[14] The percussion parts here, punctuating the gaps in the melody like hockets, irresistibly evoke a physical response.

The musical content of the high-spirited fourth movement of Copland's suite, *Burlesque*, is harder to relate to actual jazz; but the title was as deliberate a provocation as the trumpet's flutter-tongue. In French, the word (derived from the Italian *burla*, a joke) simply means comical or grotesque, a meaning that can be extended to encompass the idea of parody or caricature. In American slang, however, the term (often

pronounced "burley-cue") had come by 1925 to refer to lewd theatrical entertainments, especially striptease, and to the low-life establishments that displayed them. From there, the term implicitly encompassed all kinds of behavior and social practices that were illicit in Prohibition-era America, from the consumption of alcoholic beverages in speakeasies to the consumption of sexual favors in "houses of ill-repute." These images were exactly what "jazz" connoted to the social circles on which high culture in America depended for patronage. The middle section (Ex. 11-8), with its "dirty," low-lying trumpet solo accompanied by sweaty grunts from all the lowest instruments in the band, evoked the strutting ecdysiast "bumping and grinding" her way around the stage.

fig. 11-4 Entrance to Minsky's Burlesque (locked and guarded by the police), New York, 1930s.

Parallel motion by whole tone

ex. 11-7b Aaron Copland *Music for the Theatre*, I, Molto moderato (harmonic "planing")

ex. 11-7c Aaron Copland, *Music for the Theatre*, I, oboe solo

ex. 11-7d Aaron Copland, *Music for the Theatre*, I, Molto meno mosso

ex. 11-8 Aaron Copland, *Music for the Theatre*, IV ("Burlesque"), mm. 128–147

Copland's suite could thus be construed as biting the hand that fed him—a calculated answer-in-kind to the insult Walter Damrosch had delivered at the Symphony premiere earlier that year. Performed before a stuffy subscription audience, say, at a Boston Symphony Orchestra concert, it could count on a hostile reception. And that is just where it was performed for the first time, on 10 November 1925, between Beethoven's Fourth Symphony and the Prelude and *Liebestod* from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. It was a typically aggressive modernist bid for public notice, in which Copland was joined by Serge Koussevitzky (1874–1951), the Russian-born conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, to whom *Music for the Theatre* is dedicated.

Koussevitzky, whose marriage to an heiress had made him financially independent, was (like Stravinsky, Prokofieff, and Rachmaninoff) an émigré from the Russian revolution. From 1917 to 1924 his base was Paris, where he formed his own orchestra and gave concerts at which, thanks to his self-subsidizing, he could afford to program a great deal of contemporary music and turn his series into a major modernist forum where Stravinsky and Prokofieff (composers whose music Koussevitzky actually published for a while), and

many of the younger French generation had important premieres. Koussevitzky also befriended Nadia Boulanger and took an interest in her pupils; so that when he moved to America he was poised to launch their careers with aplomb. In this he was playing a role consciously modeled on the activities of the Russian music patron Mitrofan Belyayev (1836–1904), also the heir to an industrial fortune, who had subsidized the performance and publication of the young Russians of the generation before Stravinsky's.

fig. 11-5 Boston Symphony Orchestra under Serge Koussevitzky.

Thus the careers of the composers in the postwar American generation who studied in Paris quite directly paralleled those of the Russian "nationalist" composers of the late nineteenth century: they had a principal mentor in Nadia Boulanger, paralleling Rimsky-Korsakov (or, before him, Balakirev) and they had a principal promoter in Koussevitzky, paralleling Belyayev, who worked in active collusion with their mentor. But where Belyayev and Rimsky-Korsakov, with their conservative tastes, had acted as a restraining force on the Russian composers of their day, Boulanger and Koussevitzky were committed modernists who abetted every innovative tendency in American music. Where the older influence and the newer one coincided was in their insistence on pronounced national character in whatever music they supported.

Copland's "jazz" works fit the bill to perfection. A review of the Boston premiere of *Music for the Theatre* confirmed the work as an act of mild aggression calculated to win a place for American music as an alternative to the traditional European repertory rather than (as previously) an echo of it. It was, the critic wrote, "a tonal bombshell that left in its wake a mingling of surprise, perplexity, indignation and enthusiasm."[15] After the New York premiere the next week, Olin Downes's review announced that "we do not care if a long time elapses before we listen again to *Music for the Theatre*."[16]

That sort of reaction was in its way an encouragement to Copland and Koussevitzky, who in a larger sense were echoing Europe after all, envisioning as they did the establishment of an authentic modernist school in

America on what was by then the established European model: a maximalist nationalism followed by a chic "classical" counterpart. Copland's next work, this time directly commissioned by Koussevitzky, was a Piano Concerto that he could take around and perform himself, the model being Stravinsky's slightly "jazzy" if more overtly "Bachian" Concerto for Piano and Winds, first performed by the composer at one of the last Parisian Koussevitzky concerts, in May of 1924.

Copland's Piaro Concerto, which had its premiere in Boston in January 1927, aroused all the indignation that *Music for the Theatre* had evoked, but none of the enthusiasm. Nicolas Slonimsky (1894–1995), a Russian émigré musician who was then acting as Koussevitzky's secretary, sent Copland a malodorous bouquet of press clippings and irate letters from subscribers that unnerved the composer enough to elicit a show of bravado in response. "How flattering it was to read that the 'Listener' can understand Strauss, Debussy, Stravinsky—but not poor me," Copland wrote back to Slonimsky.[17] "When the Concerto is played again (O horrid thought!) we must see if we can't get the police to raid the concert hall to give a little added interest to this 'horrible' experiment." The critics were just as "flattering." One called the Concerto an "anti-human outrage"[18]; another characterized it as "barnyard and stable noises."[19] A third, pretending to excuse it, wrote that "some have complained that the work had no spiritual value, only animal excitement; but what else has jazz?"[20]

This last comment points to an ugly undercurrent that now made itself felt in the reception of Copland's music. The second time around, his jazz experiments evoked a racial backlash that expressed itself not directly, with slurs against the composer's musical sources, but in the form of innuendos at Copland's own "racial" or ethnic origins. A Jewish composer trading in the jazz idiom seemed too direct a challenge to Yankee leadership in American musical culture, and aroused renewed controversy, more vehement than ever, as to just what the Americanness of American music should entail.

Who, in short, could truly represent—that is, had the right to represent—America, a nation of immigrants, in folklore? Here is how the journalist Gilbert Seldes posed the question in 1926, even before Copland's Piano Concerto had appeared, in the pages of *The Dial*, a modernist literary magazine: "Can the Negro and the Jew stand in the relation of a folk to a nation? And if not, can the music they create be the national music?"[21] Most answers were dismissive, like the one given by a critic named Paul Fritz Laubenstein in an article, "Race Values in Aframerican Music," published in 1930 in the *Musical Quarterly*, then America's most scholarly musical journal. "As for jazz," he wrote, "the Negro may if he wishes claim the questionable distinction of being its originator."[22] But "the Jewish direption" or exploitation of it made it "a parasitic mannerism preying upon the classics." From the very beginning of modernism (see chapter 1), its opponents associated it with Jewishness. The urban, the commercial, and the Jewish were conflated by those who regarded them, each and all, as a threat. In postwar America, the most vocal musical antimodernist was Daniel Gregory Mason (1873–1953), who from 1929 to 1942 occupied the MacDowell chair in music at Columbia University, where he taught, all told, for almost forty years. The son, nephew, and grandson of distinguished New England musicians, Mason was the foremost living representative of the Yankee strain in American music. His compositions included a "Lincoln Symphony" and a String Quartet on Negro Themes (that is, spirituals). But he drew the line at jazz, which he associated (in an article of 1920) with "the Jewish menace to our artistic integrity."[23]

Ten years later, in a book called *Tune In, America: A Study of Our Coming Musical Independence*, Mason was ready to elaborate. Jazz based its claim to being a representative American music, Mason insisted, on its association with the myth of "American hustle," defined as "a group of qualities induced or encouraged by our present business and industrial life, such as haste, practical 'efficiency,' good humor of a superficial sort, inventiveness, an extrovert preference of action to thought—in short, all that is suggested by such popular slogans as 'Step lively' and 'Keep smiling.'"[24] Quoting an earlier writer named Hiram K. Moderwell, Mason linked jazz with "the 'jerk and rattle' of the American city, 'its restless bustle and motion, its multitude of unrelated details, and its underlying progress toward a vague somewhere,'"[25] all of which could serve equally as a general definition of "the modern."

But jazz was a spurious representation of America, Mason claimed, for the reason that it was

not, like the varied types of European folk-song to which it is often misleadingly compared, a spontaneous artistic activity of our people; it is a commercial product, like so many others 'put over' upon the people. It does not grow up in simple minds, voicing their feelings; it is manufactured by calculating ones, seeking profit. In a word, it is not an expression at all; it is an exploitation.[26]

All of this was easily read anti-Semitic code. Mason explained the success of the Jewish exploitation of the unsuspecting public in terms of the "pathological state"[27] to which the stresses of modern life have brought the American mind. Jazz, "the product of industrial cities poisoned with nervous fatigue," reflects

not our health, vitality, and hope, but our restlessness and our despair. It is a symptom of a sick moment in the progress of the human soul: the moment of industrial turmoil, fever, and distress that we can but hope to survive, not to perpetuate. To its tense, false gayety the hearing ear responds never with the joy that comes only in relaxation, but with a sense of depression that may be tinged with tragedy.... Despite its kinship with an undeniable if superficial side of our character, and in spite of its acceptability to Europeans in search rather of new sensations than of living art, the bankruptcy of jazz as a source of serious music is becoming daily more evident.

Surveying the programs of American orchestras during the 1920s for their American content, Mason noted the increasing number of native-born musicians in the latter part of the decade, but noted, too, the increasing prevalence of modernistic styles that rendered the music "a little less representatively American." Copland's Piano Concerto is singled out for dismissal, since the participation of its composer, "a cosmopolitan Jew,"[28] gave the Boston Symphony program in which he played the work "a more European, exotic flavor" than an American one. The inescapable logic of Mason's position was that neither a Negro nor a Jew could be truly an American. The "musical independence" to which the subtitle of his book alluded could only be achieved if such influences were excluded.

Copland may have been unnerved by the backlash. Although, as we shall see, he certainly did not give up the aspiration to represent America in his music, he did discard jazz after the Piano Concerto. It was a conscious decision. He told a Los Angeles interviewer about it before performing the piece in 1928, and the interview ran under a headline, "Copland to Abandon Jazz in Future Compositions."[29] Much later he told another interviewer that "I had been observing the scene around me and sensed it was about to change. Moreover, I realized that jazz might have its best treatment from those who had a talent for improvisation. I sensed its limitations, intended to make a change, and made no secret of the fact."[30]

Notes:

(10) Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984), p. 35.

(11) Quoted in Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), p. 113.

(12) Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, p. 104.

(13) *Ibid.*

(14) Ansermet, "Sur un Orchestre Nègre"; *Keeping Time*, p. 10.

(15) Warren Storey Smith in *The Boston Post*, 21 November 1925; Perlis and Copland, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, p. 121.

(16) Olin Downes in *New York Times*, 29 November 1925; *Ibid.*

(17) Aaron Copland to Nicolas Slonimsky, March 1927; in *Letters of Composers*, ed. Gertrude Norman and

Miriam Lubell Shrifte (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1945), p. 401.

(18) Unsigned editorial, *Boston Evening Transcript*, 5 February 1927; Nicolas Slonimsky, *Lexicon of Musical Invective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), p. 87.

(19) Samuel Chotzinoff, *New York World*, 4 February 1927; Slonimsky, *Lexicon*, p. 86.

(20) John Tasker Howard, *Our Contemporary Composers* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1941), p. 149.

(21) Gilbert Seldes, "The Negro's Songs," *Dial*, March 1926; quoted in Macdonald Smith Moore, *Yankee Blues: Musical Culture and American Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 144.

(22) Fritz Laubenstein, "Race Values in Aframerican Music"; quoted in Moore, *Yankee Blues*, p. 143.

(23) Daniel Gregory Mason, "Is American Music Growing Up? Our Emancipation from Alien Influences," *Arts and Decoration*, November 1920; quoted in D. G. Mason, *Tune In, America: A Study of Our Coming Musical Independence* (1931; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), p. 160.

(24) Mason, *Tune In, America*, p. 162.

(25) Hiram K. Moderwell, *The New Republic*, 16 October 1915; quoted in Mason, *Tune In, America*, p. 163.

(26) Mason, *Tune In, America*, pp. 163–64.

(27) *Ibid.*, pp. 164–65.

(28) *Ibid.*, p. 28.

(29) *Los Angeles News*, 20 July 1928; Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, p. 134.

(30) Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, p. 134.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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George Gershwin

Tin Pan Alley

Paul Whiteman

REDEMPTION

Chapter: CHAPTER 11 In Search of the "Real" America
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The late recollection is tinged with patronization, typical of "literate" attitudes toward the "limitations" of an oral genre. That was hardly Copland's point of view in the 1920s. In trying to comprehend his decision to abandon jazz, it will be useful to compare the bad reception his jazz-influenced compositions met with the altogether different reception some seemingly similar works by another American composer enjoyed around the same time. What on the surface may appear paradoxical will on investigation prove revealing.

George Gershwin (1898–1937), Copland's near exact contemporary, had a very similar ethnic and family background. Like Copland, he was born in Brooklyn to Jewish parents who had emigrated to the United States from Russia. He even studied briefly with the same teacher, Rubin Goldmark, though at a later stage of life than Copland. Both Copland and Gershwin left school to pursue their musical careers before attending college. But where Copland made the decision voluntarily after graduating from high school, and pursued a full-time musical education at Fontainebleau, Gershwin, who came from a much poorer family, dropped out of high school at fourteen, the youngest age then legal, in order to earn a living.

A precocious pianist, gifted with a remarkable ear, Gershwin found work as a "song-plugger" for a music publisher. His job was to play items of "sheet-music" by request, so that prospective purchasers, both amateur pianists and variety-show ("vaudeville") singers, could hear the songs the firm was offering for sale. The position required a fluent piano technique and a talent for stylish embellishment or improvisation by ear (the very skill Copland lacked and slightly scorned). It was natural that a song-plugger would turn to writing popular songs himself, in the highly standardized format that was the stock-in-trade of "Tin Pan Alley."

fig. 11-6 George Gershwin, self-portrait in oils (1934).

Tin Pan Alley was the nickname for the songwriting and music-publishing industry that grew up in New York in the 1890s and lasted roughly until the Second World War. Evoking the sound of the weather-beaten upright pianos on which pluggers like Gershwin plied their trade in publishers' salesrooms on East 14th Street in lower Manhattan, the name was coined by Monroe Rosenfeld (1861–1918), who worked as both a songwriter and a journalist. As a business, Tin Pan Alley was indeed heavily populated if not dominated by Jewish entrepreneurs, and it employed many Jewish songwriters as well. Its products were used not only in domestic parlors but also, and primarily, in the variety theaters on Broadway, and in their Yiddish counterparts on Second Avenue in the Lower East Side.

Within a year of his first employment as a song-plugger, Gershwin had sufficiently distinguished himself as a pianist to find work cutting player-piano rolls for home use, and became a sought-after accompanist for professional entertainers. In 1917 he moved from Tin Pan Alley to the more prestigious theater world uptown, becoming the rehearsal pianist for a "revue" or plotless song-and-dance show called *Miss 1917*, with music by Victor Herbert (1859–1924) and Jerome Kern (1885–1945), who with Irving Berlin (1888–1989) were then the reigning composers on Broadway. The next year, on the strength of a few published songs and piano pieces, Gershwin was put on retainer by Max Dreyfus, the head of T. B. Harms & Co., Tin Pan Alley's biggest publishing firm; for $35 a week, Harms received the "right of first refusal" on anything the young composer might produce.

It was a good bet. In 1920, *Swanee*, a Gershwin song Harms had published in 1919, was recorded by the blackface singer Al Jolson (1886–1950) and became a runaway hit, earning the composer a then fantastic royalty of $10,000 in its first year. More important, it made him a bankable "name" composer for Broadway producers. During the five years 1920–1924, Gershwin wrote the scores for eleven Broadway shows, of which seven were revues, the rest "musical comedies" (later shortened to "musicals"), meaning shows with dramatic plots that emulated operettas. From these shows, seventy-two songs were harvested for publication

as sheet music, in addition to sixteen songs that Gershwin wrote for insertion into shows by other composers, and seven "occasional" items that were either dropped from shows or composed directly for sheet-music sale. Added to the songs Gershwin had written up to his first year under contract to Harms, they made a total of well over a hundred songs.

Practically all of them were written according to the same "industrial" formula, a necessity for maintaining such a high commercial productivity. (In this, Tin Pan Alley resembled the Italian opera of a hundred years before, or the early "classical" symphony, other literate genres that required a high volume and that consequently relied on similarly standardized and stereotyped formal designs of a kind more often found in oral cultures.) The standard form was the 32-bar "chorus" or refrain (usually preceded by one or two introductory "verses" that were often omitted). The thirty-two bars were grouped in four eight-bar phrases or "lines" that were cast musically in age-old "fixed" patterns like AABA, ABAB, ABCA, or AABC, of which the first was by far the most prevalent. In its commonest variant, the first two lines had closed and open endings, respectively; the "B" (often called the "bridge" or "release") comprised two 4-bar phrases like the two short lines in a limerick, and the final line repeated the "closed" version of A, thus: AA′BA. (The remotest literate ancestors of this fixed form, also associated with the *cabaletta* or fast concluding section of an Italian opera aria, were composed by the troubadours, Aquitanian (southern French) poet-musicians of the eleventh century.) As an example of a Tin Pan Alley chorus, "You Don't Know the Half of It, Dearie" (Ex. 11-9), a song from *Lady, Be Good!* (one of four Gershwin shows to open in 1924), will be particularly useful, since it very pointedly illustrates the relationship between Tin Pan Alley and "jazz." It is billed as a "blues" number (marketed as sheet music as "the Half of It, Dearie, Blues") and it appropriates a number of style features from the typical African-American blues as illustrated in Ex. 11-4, by W. C. Handy. The first line, in fact, could have been from an actual blues, both because of its harmony, confined (or confinable) to the tonic triad, and because of its rhythmic structure (all the words concentrated in its first half, with the rest free for "riffing," or for improvisation by the accompanying instrument). There is even a blue note on "Dearie."

ex. 11-9 George Gershwin, *Lady, Be Good!*, "You Don't Know the Half of It, Dearie"

But what was a "12-bar" structure in three lines has been stretched out to meet the requirements of the standard chorus in four, and the distinctive harmonic succession that makes a blues a blues has also been abandoned in favor of a freer set of harmonic "changes." The blues, in short, has become (like all forms of "jazz") one of many flavorings available to the Tin Pan Alley composer. The Tin Pan Alley standard was already a thoroughly hybrid, Europeanized adaptation of jazz, like the ones by Milhaud and Ravel we have already seen; only in place of the modernist insistence on originality of style and form it demanded conformity to a commercial template.

The same year in which he wrote *Lady, Be Good!*, Gershwin was unexpectedly given an opportunity to cross over into more "serious" terrain when Paul Whiteman (1890–1967), a popular bandleader with a classical background who was planning a big concert tour of the United States, invited the young Broadway composer, already known for his remarkable keyboard facility and extraordinary melodic gift, to compose an extended work for piano and large dance orchestra in the form of a "rhapsody." The genre, not really a form but a title popularized by Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, was cannily chosen. It connoted at once a romantically "free" form, an opportunity for pianistic display, and a programmatically "nationalistic" statement of a sort that many American composers were then contemplating.

The piece that Gershwin came up with, *Rhapsody in Blue*, was first performed (in an orchestration by Whiteman's arranger, Ferde Grofé) on Lincoln's birthday, 12 February 1924. It came near the end of a long matinee concert called "An Experiment in Modern Music," for which Whiteman had rented Aeolian Hall, a concert venue maintained by a player-piano manufacturing firm, where Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony gave their concerts (and where Copland's early symphony—plus Damrosch's preposterous comment about it—would be heard a year later). The ticket-selling gimmick was the announcement that a panel of experts—Rachmaninoff, the violinists Jascha Heifetz and Efrem Zimbalist, and the latter's wife, the soprano Alma Gluck—would judge the compositions presented and decide which were the most authentically American.[31] (The fact that three of the panelists were Russian-born and the fourth Romanian seems to have been no impediment to their expertise.)

Other big names in music who were listed as official "patrons" of the event included the Swiss-born composer Ernest Bloch, the Dutchman Willem Mengelberg (then leading the New York Philharmonic), the Vienna-born violinist Fritz Kreisler, the Lithuanian-born pianist Leopold Godowsky, and the Italian-born Metropolitan Opera soprano Amelita Galli-Curci. A prefatory note in the program book, by Whiteman's manager, stated the purpose of the program:

> The experiment is purely educational. Mr. Whiteman intends to point out, with the assistance of the orchestra and associates, the tremendous strides which have been made in popular music from the day of the discordant jazz, which sprang into existence about ten years ago from nowhere in particular, to the really melodious music of today which—for no good reason—is still being called jazz.[32]

"From nowhere in particular ..." The program was in essence an attempt to sanitize contemporary popular music and elevate it in public esteem by divorcing it from its roots in African-American improvised music and securing endorsements from the classical music establishment. The twenty-five pieces on the program were grouped into sections with slightly pretentious titles like "The True Form of Jazz," "Recent Compositions with Modern Score," "In the Field of Classics," "Flavoring a Selection with Borrowed Themes," and "Adaptation of Standard Selections to Dance Rhythm." Gershwin's culminating *Rhapsody* and Victor Herbert's *Suite of Serenades*, the most ambitious items performed, were sections unto themselves.

Rhapsody in Blue was a huge success with the audience, who had been beginning to show signs of listlessness as its turn approached. The critics were also kind. Deems Taylor (1885–1966), not only a critic but also the successful composer of two operas performed at the Metropolitan, and who had been listed in the program as a "patron" (which made his reviewing the concert a somewhat questionable proposition), allowed that Gershwin's composition "hinted at something new, something that had not hitherto been said in music."[33] Gershwin, he predicted, would provide "a link between the jazz camp and the intellectuals." W. J. Henderson (1855–1937), then the dean of New York critics, saw Whiteman's concert as a milestone, achieving "the total eclipse of the other kind of moderns—all save one, Stravinsky."[34] Mengelberg went further, exclaiming that "Gershwin had succeeded in doing what Stravinsky was [only] trying to do."[35] Olin Downes, who as we know would have harsh words for Copland's *Music for the Theatre*, wrote in the *New York Times*, a little cryptically, that in spite of a certain "technical immaturity," Gershwin's was "a new talent finding its voice, and likely to say something personally and racially important to the world."[36] Given the premises of the concert, as well as the controversies we have already sampled surrounding Copland's Jewishness, Downes's use of the word "racially" may seem dubious or even sinister; in its context, however, it probably referred not to the composer's Jewishness or to the negritude of his models, but more innocently

to his music's distinctively New World flavor.

The music critic (and novelist and photographer) Carl Van Vechten (1880–1964), who had already made a name for himself as a proponent of modern music with, among other things, an ebullient account of *The Rite of Spring* premiere, declared *Rhapsody in Blue* "the very finest piece of serious music that had ever come out of America,"[37] and in a letter to the composer he went furthest of all. "Go straight on," he advised Gershwin, "and you will knock all Europe silly."[38] Others seemed to sense this, too: the only discordant notes in the *Rhapsody's* reception came from the proponents of "high" European modernism, who reacted to the "lowbrow" threat with condescension. "You must whisper it softly," wrote Carl Engel, a columnist for the *Musical Quarterly*, "when you dare suggest that at last America has a music all its own," originating not "at the top, in the Hermetic circles of New Music Societies, Manuscript Societies, Associations for the Promotion of Native Talent, and the like, but at the bottom, in the street."[39]

In the wake of *Rhapsody in Blue* Gershwin received a commission from Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony for a traditional three-movement piano concerto with full orchestra, a far more ambitious and in some ways more sophisticated work, which received its premiere in Carnegie Hall on 3 December 1925. The critics again were welcoming, one going so far as to remark that "of all those writing the music of today," Gershwin "alone actually expresses us."[40] The timing makes it likely that the success of Gershwin's Concerto in F, as he called it, was among the factors that stimulated Copland to compose his own piano concerto. As we know, Copland's work was greeted with a hostile, insulting, and ultimately discouraging reception.

The encouragement Gershwin received, by contrast, steadily increased. *Rhapsody in Blue* turned out to be perhaps the most lucrative piece of concert music ever composed, earning the composer more than a quarter of a million dollars from performance and recording royalties and rental fees during the first ten years of its existence, both in its original scoring for dance band and in its 1926 "symphonic" version (also the work of Ferde Grofé). It is worth noting that much of this income was earned from sales of piano rolls and recordings, and from radio broadcasts, making Gershwin the first composer of concert music to benefit conspicuously from the new mechanized and electronic dissemination-media of the twentieth century. Gershwin readily recognized this. In an essay called "The Composer in the Machine Age," published in 1930 in a volume titled *Revolt in the Arts*, he voiced the soon-to-be-controversial thesis that "the composer, in my estimation, has been helped a great deal by the mechanical reproduction of music."[41] In 1928, shortly after Ravel visited America, Gershwin made the reverse trip, and, as Carl Van Vechten predicted, "knocked all Europe silly." He was lionized everywhere, not only by audiences but by leading modernist composers —Prokofieff, Milhaud, Poulenc, Ravel, Berg—who accepted him as a peer. (Or more than a peer: a famous anecdote has Gershwin asking Ravel for orchestration lessons; after inquiring what Gershwin had earned from his music the previous year, Ravel remarks, "Then it is I who should be taking lessons from you.") No American creative musician ever equaled Gershwin's European conquest, attributable partly—but only partly—to its timing at the height of the "jazz age," when everything American was singularly in vogue in Europe.

The direct issue of Gershwin's trip to Europe was a tone poem, *An American in Paris*, which had its first performance under Damrosch in December 1928. The slower middle section, which according to Gershwin's program note expresses the title character's homesickness, reverts to the idiom of the *Rhapsody in Blue*; the bustling outer sections, however, in which Gershwin worked the sound of taxi horns into his orchestration, shows him aspiring, like the composers of the Boulangerie, toward the general European modernist idiom in its Parisian "neoclassical" version as exemplified by the work of Ravel and Les Six (and, more remotely, by Stravinsky).

All through the late 1920s Gershwin continued working in the Broadway theater and, after the invention of "talkies" around 1930, in Hollywood (where he met and befriended the exiled Arnold Schoenberg). Despite his fame and financial success he continued to take sporadic composition lessons from Rubin Goldmark, Henry Cowell, and Wallingford Riegger (1885–1961), an American composer of an older generation who had studied at the Berlin Conservatory. Finally, in 1932, acting on the advice of Alexander Glazunov, a veteran Russian composer who toured America in 1929, Gershwin sought out Joseph Schillinger (1895–1943), a Russian-born composer and music theorist whose extremely schematic methods were later published in a

massive two-volume treatise, *The Schillinger System of Musical Composition* (already sampled in Ex. 6-23).

Schillinger was then enjoying something of a vogue among musicians from the popular-music and theatrical spheres who were looking for technical grounding in serious genres; among his other pupils were the pianist-composer Oscar Levant (1906–72), the jazz clarinettist and bandleader Benny Goodman (1909–86), and the bandleader and jazz trombonist Glenn Miller (1904–44). Gershwin worked with Schillinger for four years, during which time he wrote his most ambitious score, an "American folk opera" called *Porgy and Bess*, after a novel-turned-play by DuBose Heyward about life among the poor black residents of Charleston, South Carolina. The libretto, in Negro-American dialect, was by the composer's brother, Ira Gershwin (1896–1983), who had long been his chief songwriting collaborator.

The four works of Gershwin described in the foregoing sketch have joined the permanent standard concert and operatic repertory, and not only in America. They are, moreover, the only American works of "symphonic jazz" to have done so, all others, including Copland's, having lapsed long ago into obscurity. Though occasionally revived, they now present chiefly a historical interest. In part, the lasting success of Gershwin's contributions is attributable, of course, to their qualities as art works and the pleasure they give audiences. But the enormous discrepancy between the reception accorded Copland and that accorded Gershwin as "jazz" composers requires analysis as a historical phenomenon. That analysis must of course begin with an analysis of Gershwin's music to match the one already given Copland's.

Notes:

(31) "Whiteman Judges Named: Committee Will Decide 'What Is American Music?' (*New York Tribune*, 4 January 1924); photo inset in Edward Jablonski and Lawrence D. Stewart, *The Gershwin Years* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973), p. 89.

(32) Hugh C. Ernst, introduction to the Whiteman program book; quoted in Thornton Hagert, "Jazz Invades Aeolian Hall," liner insert to *An Experiment in Modern Music: Paul Whiteman at Aeolian Hall* (The Smithsonian Collection R 028, 1981).

(33) Quoted in Joan Peyser, *The Memory of All That: The Life of George Gershwin* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 84.

(34) *New York Herald*, 13 February 1924; quoted in Carol J. Oja, "Gershwin and American Modernists of the 1920s," *Musical Quarterly* LXXVIII (1994): 653.

(35) H.O. Osgood, *So This Is Jazz* (1926); quoted in Oja, "Gershwin and American Modernists," p. 652.

(36) Quoted in Peyser, *The Memory of All That*, p. 84.

(37) *Vanity Fair*, March 1925; quoted in Oja, "Gershwin and American Modernists," p. 653.

(38) Quoted in Schiff, *Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue*, p. 89.

(39) Carl Engel, "Views and Reviews," *Muiscal Quarterly* XII (1926): 306.

(40) Samuel Chotzinoff (*New York World*); quoted in Peyser, *The Memory of All That*, p. 107.

(41) George Gershwin, "The Composer in the Machine Age," *Revolt of the Arts* (1930); rpt. in Gilbert Chase, *The American Composer Speaks* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. 144.

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Gershwin: Rhapsody in Blue

Blues and the white audience

"SOCIOSTYLISTICS"

Chapter: CHAPTER 11 In Search of the "Real" America
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Gershwin intended his jazz-inflected concert music to reflect contemporary American urban life—that is, American modernity. *Rhapsody in Blue* was conceived on a train, Gershwin wrote in a letter to his first biographer, in response to "its steely rhythms, its rattlety-bang," and the composition was "a musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our national pep, of our blues, our metropolitan madness."[42] The Concerto in F, for similar reasons, was originally to have been called *New York Concerto*.

Both compositions open, as Copland's *Music for the Theatre* also opens, with what Gershwin called an "icebreaker," a term used on Broadway for a device to grab the audience's attention. In Copland's case it was a trumpet flutter-tongue. In the Concerto in F it was a noisy solo on the kettledrums. The most famous one, at the beginning of *Rhapsody in Blue*, is a clarinet glissando of a type that was pioneered as a special effect by African-American jazz players (based, W. C. Handy wrote, on the "false fingering and incorrect lipping"[43] of self-taught players). It was imparted to Gershwin by Ross Gorman, a player in Whiteman's orchestra, and (in the words of the conductor Maurice Peress) it became "the bane of symphony clarinettists ever since."[44] So far *Rhapsody in Blue* sounds just as aggressively (or "futuristically") modernistic as *Music for the Theatre*.

Thereafter, however, the piece settles down into a medley of five tunes, each resembling a Tin Pan Alley chorus in one way or another, connected by cadenzas and virtuoso roulades, all adhering more or less strictly to the obligatory AA′BA format (Ex. 11-10). Whether because Gershwin selected them with an eye toward the coherence of the whole, or simply because it was such a cliché of the Tin Pan Alley style, four out of five exhibit the same standard ragtime syncopation —()— at some point. Their complete statements are as follows:

I: mm. 38–54, 72–90, *225–240*

II: mm. *91–106*

III: mm. 115–129, *179–194*, 198–213, 486–501

IV: mm. *138–153* ..., 257–271 ...

V: mm. 300 ff.

The numbers in italics represent statements that conform exactly to the specifications of the 32-bar chorus, here reduced to 16 bars (4 + 4 + 4 + 4) by the use of halved note-values and double measures, typical of instrumental arrangements. Elsewhere the phrase lengths are truncated or extended for the sake of character or variety, just as Haydn and Mozart had varied the symmetrical patterns that typified their "classical" style, by tried-and-true methods that could be compared either with those of the eighteenth-century masters or with those of contemporary pop music performers.

Comparing the "classic" statement of I with its first appearance, for example, one observes how the initial

AA′ is extended from eight bars to ten by adding a measure of "riffing" (motivic repetition) to each phrase, just as a blues singer might do. The riff itself, assigned by Grofé to the distinctive timbre of the bass clarinet, is the same standard tag line ("Good evening, friends") that Milhaud had already appropriated in *La création du monde* (Ex. 11-2). Even in its "classic" statement, chorus I is somewhat unconventional thanks to the sudden modulation that takes place at the bridge and is never undone, so that the tune ends in a different key from its beginning. That was a technique routinely employed in musical comedy overtures, in essence tune medleys like *Rhapsody in Blue*, to achieve smooth transitions.

ex. 11-10a George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue* themes, I (mm. 225–240)

ex. 11-10b George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue* themes, II (mm. 91–106)

ex. 11-10c George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue* themes, III (mm. 179–194)

ex. 11-10d George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue* themes, IV (mm. 138–153)

ex. 11-10e George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue* themes, V (mm. 300ff).

Chorus III, the tune most frequently heard in *Rhapsody in Blue*, and the one usually thought of as its main theme, is also the one most explicitly "bluesy" in character, with its double-inflected seventh degrees ("blue notes") and its measure-long riffs. Chorus II, heard only once, is a "Latin" (or "Cuban") number, with its languorous melodic triplets and its 3 + 3 + 2 accompaniment patterns. Chorus IV is always heard incomplete, its final A dovetailed into a sequential development. These modulatory sequences, which proceed through/ 0 3 6 9 /circles of minor thirds, suggest that Gershwin actually turned to Liszt's rhapsodies for guidance (just as the white-key/black-key opposition elsewhere suggests that he had been playing or listening to Stravinsky's *Petrushka*.)

Another indication that Liszt was the model is the slow "lyrical" theme at m. 300, which suggests Liszt's method of compressing the movements of a traditional concerto (or symphony) into a single temporal span. This theme departs furthest from the 32-bar format, through a process of elision that will again, perhaps surprisingly, bring the techniques of Haydn or Mozart to mind. (But not really surprisingly, given the congruity between the formulas of Tin Pan Alley and those of any "classic" idiom.) The last note of A′ is dovetailed with the first note of B, and the final C is dovetailed with the first A of a wholesale repetition. This theme is the only one in *Rhapsody in Blue* to undergo something akin to a development. Again the tonal trajectory is determined by a root progression that moves through a circle of minor thirds.

This final development (or "developmental coda" à la Beethoven) is balanced at the other end of the Rhapsody by the 37-bar introduction (Ex. 11-11), which juxtaposes fragments or motives from themes I and III with the "Good evening, friends" riff. Opening in B♭ major, it goes through a possibly unprecedented eight progressions along the circle of fifths (E♭ in m. 11, A♭ in m. 16, D♭ (V) in m. 19, G♭ (I) in m. 21, B (V) in m. 27, E (V) in mm. 26–37) to prepare the first full chorus, which comes in at m. 38 in A major, the first key to be fully established as a tonic.

The last key to function as a stable tonic is E♭ major, at the triumphant final reprise of III (m. 486). (The tritone relationship that thus governs the whole trajectory can again be related to Liszt's practice, especially as later adapted by Rimsky-Korsakov.) Thus it seems a little forced and dutiful when Gershwin yanks the key to B♭ at the very end (Ex. 11-12) for a grandiose *Molto allargando*, just so that the ending can parallel the opening gesture and the piece can seem to end in the "right" key, that of the beginning. Since neither the opening nor the closing B♭s play a genuinely defining role in the tonal plan, the effect of the ending, for all its pep and rattlety-bang, is a bit perfunctory or gratuitous, a letdown.

That may seem an overly critical or patronizing way to describe it, but in fact that suggestion of naïveté or clumsiness of construction seems to have been one of the factors that helped win the *Rhapsody* its success—or at least its initial acceptance by the same classical-music establishment that roundly rejected Copland's "jazz"-inspired essays. The fact that the Tin Pan Alley materials in Gershwin's *Rhapsody* were presented in something like their raw state, like the Gypsy tunes in Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* or in Brahms's *Hungarian Dances* (or the Czech folk songs in Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*, or the Norwegian folk songs in Edvard Grieg's *Norwegian Dances* of 1881, or the Spanish folk songs in Isaac Albéniz's *Cantos de España* of 1896) lent them the character of folklore rather than commercial art.

Equating the Tin Pan Alley product with "jazz," as white Americans tended to do, Gershwin drew the analogy explicitly in a statement published in 1933: "Jazz I regard as an American folk-music; not the only one, but a very powerful one which is probably in the blood and feeling of the American people more than any other style of folk-music."[45] In this way, *Rhapsody in Blue* could be seen as fulfilling Dvořák's prescription for an American music that would elevate the musical utterances of the folk by means of "beautiful treatment in the higher forms of art." The dynamic—mark it well—was *upward*.

ex. 11-11 George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue*, mm. 1–27

That being so, it did not hurt but actually helped if, in the eyes of the critics, the work fell somewhat short of its goal. Olin Downes preceded his remark about Gershwin's "racial importance" by noting that the *Rhapsody* "shows extraordinary talent, just as it also shows a young composer with aims that go far beyond those of his ilk, struggling with a form of which he is far from being master."[46] Going far beyond your "ilk" was one way of defining "upward mobility"—the vaunted American dream. Gershwin's achievement thus fulfilled not only a musical but also a social aspiration, and one that embodied a message of redemption. A remark he made in an interview with a *New York Times* reporter in 1935 shows Gershwin's awareness of the quasi-religious power of literate culture to cleanse, redeem, and "deliver" the oral. "When I wrote the *Rhapsody in Blue*," he declared, "I took 'blues' and put them in a larger and more serious form. That was twelve years ago and the *Rhapsody in Blue* is still very much alive, whereas if I had taken the same themes and put them in songs they would have been gone years ago."[47]

ex. 11-12 George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue*, end

A "larger and more serious form" was also (and principally) a textually fixed and determined form, even if, as Gershwin implicitly acknowledged, it remained pretty much a medley of songs. By in effect teaching "jazz" to read he was offering it immortality. And respectability: the classical models to which he aspired as vessels of immortality—the folkloric rhapsodies of the romantic era—were by the 1920s a thoroughly genteel and domesticated repertory, the very opposite of modernist. The chapter devoted to the concert music in the earliest Gershwin biography—Isaac Goldberg's *George Gershwin: A Study in American Music* (1931), based on interviews with the composer—is called "Lady Jazz in the Concert Hall," and the last chapter is titled "The Wedding of Jazz to Symphonic Art." No wonder a publicity phrase that was widely used to introduce Gershwin to movie and radio audiences in the 1930s described him as "the man who made an honest woman out of jazz."[48] That could never be said of Copland, who was seen, antithetically, as the one who degraded the higher forms of music to the level of the burley-cues. With his elite European education and his sophisticated technique, Copland's assertively modernistic use of jazz represented a *downward* social dynamic. It brought out the fear of jazz as a socially regressive force. When Glazunov heard *Rhapsody in Blue* he described it to Walter Damrosch's wife as "part human and part animal."[49] The remark was taken as a compliment because it was assumed that Gershwin's mission was to humanize the animal instincts of jazz. Yet the very same racist view of American popular music worked against Copland, as we have seen, to the extent of provoking an anti-Semitic backlash. His music threatened to animalize humanistic art.

Perhaps the most pointed comment of all on the "sociostylistics" of American music with respect to jazz—that is, the social implications of stylistic assimilation—came from Edward Burlingame Hill (1872–1960), a composer on the faculty of Harvard University and a leading Francophile. The only critic to make a direct comparison between *Rhapsody in Blue* and the earlier European experiments in jazz appropriation (Copland's concerto not yet having been performed), Hill observed in the *Harvard Graduate's Magazine* that "Mr. Gershwin's works indicate that it may be more profitable for the jazz composer to turn to the larger forms than for the 'high-brow' composer to condescend to jazz."[50] Because his work was so clearly "aspirant" rather than "condescending," Gershwin's reputation never suffered from a racial backlash, not even from the likes of Daniel Gregory Mason; and that is the best evidence of all that, unlike Copland, he was not regarded as a threat—until, that is, he completed his studies with Schillinger and presented himself, in *Porgy and Bess*, as a fully-armed professional, prompting Virgil Thomson to carp somewhat cryptically at its "gefiltefish orchestration"[51] (*gefilte fish*, or "stuffed fish," being a Jewish Sabbath-eve delicacy). But even then, his suppliant stance made Gershwin easy to tolerate, whether by bigots like Mason or by elite modernists like Schoenberg. His message to the establishment was flattering, and room was found for him.

Notes:

(42) George Gershwin to Isaac Goldberg; quoted in Peyser, *The Memory of All That*, pp. 80–81.

(43) W. C. Handy, *Father of the Blues* (1941); Ruth Halle Rowen, *Music through Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979), p. 341.

(44) Maurice Peress, liner note to *The Birth of Rhapsody in Blue: Paul Whiteman's Historic Aeolian Hall Concert of 1924* (Musical Heritage Society MHS Stereo 827531 Y, 1987).

(45) George Gershwin, "The Relation of Jazz to American Music," in *American Composers on American Music*, ed. Henry Cowell (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1933), p. 187.

(46) Quoted in Jablonski and Stewart, *The Gershwin Years*, p. 95.

(47) "Rhapsody in Catfish Row: Mr. Gershwin Tells the Origin and Scheme for His Music in That New Folk Opera Called 'Porgy and Bess,' " *New York Times*, 20 October 1935; quoted in Charles Hamm, "Towards a New Reading of Gershwin," in Wayne Schneider, ed., *The Gershwin Style: New Looks at the Music of George Gershwin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 9.

(48) Cf. Rudy Vallee Hour, broadcast 10 November 1932, on *Gershwin Conducts Excerpts from Porgy and*

Bess, **Mark 56 Records 667 (1974).**

(49) Quoted in the *Alexander Glazunov Society Quarterly Newsletter* **II, no. 1 (July 1986): 12.**

(50) Edward Burlingame Hill, "Jazz," *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, **March 1926; Oja, "Gershwin and American Modernists," p. 654.**

(51) Virgil Thomson, review of Porgy and Bess in *Modern Music* **XIII, no. 1 (November 1935): 18.**

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Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

What ultimately killed off "symphonic jazz" was not so much snobbery or bigotry as it was the advent of the Great Depression of the 1930s, which abruptly put an end to the "jazz age" or "roaring twenties," the decade of postwar hedonism that had sustained the experimental fusion of genres both in Europe and in America. The times now demanded not "American hustle" and "metropolitan madness," but a music that could sustain faith with eloquence. Again Stravinsky set the tone in Europe, with his *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), an austerely rapt three-movement cantata that he composed in response to a commission from Koussevitzky for a symphony to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

In America a new national image took hold in the arts. Its earnest optimism and loftiness of expression were epitomized (and affectionately caricatured) by the cliché image of writers aspiring to produce "the Great American Novel." For a Great American Symphony to emerge, greatness itself would have to stage a musical comeback: the ironic mood that was so basic to the postwar esthetic would have somehow to be overcome. "Jazz," among white Americans often an expression of insouciance, would have to be supplanted. Jazz had begun in any case to seem to many American artists too much a mirror of European attitudes toward the New World; its espousal by "sophisticated composers," Henry Cowell argued, was "based on the curious bias of the Parisian's concept of America."

Artistic inspiration tended now to flow not from the industrial centers of the Eastern seaboard but from the traditional mythology of the American West, which in place of bustling urban scenes—crowds, haste, frenzy—emphasized open spaces, imperturbable vision, fortitude, and self-reliance, in other words the "pioneer spirit." And just as the demand was being felt for such a music, a supplier turned up as if sent by Central Casting. He became for half a dozen years the acknowledged sonic incarnation of the American spirit, hailed by one enthusiastic writer as early as 1931 as "the white hope of the nationalists."[52] That summed it up in more ways, possibly, than the writer had in mind.

fig. 11-7 Roy Harris, undated photo, possibly ca. 1960.

He was Roy Harris (1898–1979), "an Oklahoma Composer Who Was Born in a Log Cabin on Lincoln's Birthday," to cite (in part!) the bulkily insistent title of an unpublished promotional biography written on Harris's behalf (and Koussevitzky's behest) by Nicolas Slonimsky in the years of the composer's first fame. He could have done even better: the part of Oklahoma (then not yet a state but an "Indian Territory") in which Harris was born on Lincoln's birthday was actually called Lincoln County. But maybe Slonimsky thought that would strain credibility. Harris came honestly by an "image" no press agent would dare invent.

When he was five, his family moved to southern California to farm. Harris worked the land as a youth, drove a truck, and did odd jobs. He received his early musical instruction from his mother on the farm. He did not apply himself seriously to composition until he was in his late twenties, when he sought out as a teacher Arthur Farwell (1877–1952), an "Americanist" composer who had studied in Germany but who in his creative work followed the "other" side of Dvořák's advice and sought to found his personal style on American Indian melodies, many of which he arranged for piano. Harris did not follow Farwell in this practice, but did inherit from his teacher a suspicion of European modernism and an aversion to urbanist styles.

His background, in short, was the very antithesis of Copland's and Gershwin's. Nevertheless, on meeting Copland in 1926, he took the latter's advice and went to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger. He stayed until 1929, and wrote under Boulanger's tutelage the works that gained him his first professional recognition. In later life, however, he refused to acknowledge her as an influence on his development, and pointedly held aloof from the Boulangerie. Slonimsky, purporting to reproduce a conversation with the composer, reported that

> The first year in Paris was torture to our composer. He was worried and disappointed. He disagreed violently with his great teacher. He came to get *knowledge* and *discipline*. She preached both. But her knowledge was a detailed cataloguing of what had already been done; her discipline, a Royalist-

Catholic negation of spontaneity. She taught the doctrine of conservation—the tailor-made article designed from any material to meet the needs of the time and place. He was in search of the machinery with which to release and harness the wild horses within him.[53]

Later still, Harris put things in a less contentious perspective, comparing his obstreperous younger self very aptly to "the rookie who came to France to win the war."[54] But the passage from Slonimsky's biography is an important clue to Harris's brand of Americanism—and, of course, it was not only Harris's. It was a brand that defined itself vehemently against Europe, the realm of authority (royal, papal) and of codified procedure. To be American was to be spontaneous, wild, free. An American was a self-made man.

Harris translated the last phrase directly into an idiosyncratic technical or esthetic vocabulary. In a program note for a "big symphony from the West" that Koussevitzky impulsively commissioned from him at their first meeting in 1933, Harris coined the term *autogenetic*—nothing more or less than a fancy Latinate equivalent of "self-made"—to describe a process of melodic construction that he regarded as innately Western-American. An ardent supporter, Arthur Mendel (then a young critic, later an eminent American musicologist) attempted an explanation of the autogenetic principle in an article in *The Nation*, then (like most American "general interest" magazines of the time) intensely interested in following and abetting the development of serious musical composition in the United States. "Roy Harris," Mendel wrote,

> is trying to work out an idiom in which the structure shall be based on the self-determined growth of the melodic material, not on any superimposed form .... His music must be just as cogent and logical and structurally perfect as he can make it. But its form must be determined by its content. It must grow as a plant or an animal grows, along lines dictated by its own inner necessity, not imposed on it from above.[55]

There is of course nothing specifically American about these ideas. They were boilerplate romanticism and echoed the clichés of "organicism" and "content-determined form" first enunciated as planks in the influential platform of the New German School. But the specific ways in which Harris applied them did produce melodies that could be taken as emblems of Western America. Slonimsky, a noted walking thesaurus, called them "heliotropic," a botanical term that means "growing toward the sun." His prime example was the second theme of the "big symphony from the West" that Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony performed on 26 January 1934 under the title *Symphony 1933* (Ex. 11-13a). Slonimsky called particular attention to the "ascetic intervals that suggest monastic origin," which, he proposed,

> are reflective in an American composer of the spacious Western deserts. Harris is not a poet of the city and does not take interest in "depicting the age of machinery." In his music he is always a Westerner; his rhythmical verve reflects the dry energy of the mountain air.[56]

ex. 11-13a Roy Harris, "autogenetic" melodies, *Symphony 1933*, I, second theme

The prevalence of quarter-note triplets, usually in a "circumflex" or "anticircumflex" contour, is evidence of Harris's "autogenetic" technique: everything derives from a single shape, the arch. As Beth Levy, a historian of musical Americanism, notes, that arch shape pervades the melody at higher levels of structure as well. The whole melody is a composite of overlapping arched figures of varying lengths: mm. 1–4, 4–7, 7–9, 9–10, 10–13, 15–17, 17–18, 18–20, 20–21. And its overall span proceeds from the next-to-lowest note (the initial d″) to a single high point in the middle (the g″″ in m. 11) and down again to the lowest note (d♭″ in m. 21).

That property of "imbricated arches," plus what Levy calls its "casually wandering chromaticism,"[57] lend the melody a quality that led critic after critic to describe Harris's music as deriving, in the words of one, "from the West that bred Mr. Harris and in which he works most eagerly—from its air, its life, its impulses, even its gaits." Nobody seems to have remarked on the resemblance between Harris's technique and Schoenberg's already well-publicized principle of "developing variation" (nor were associations to the American West ever read into Schoenberg's many "heliotropic" melodies). That power of suggestion is significant, however, because it showed that it was possible to create a distinctively American music—that is, a music that would be received and valued by its audience as distinctively American—without recourse to "found objects" of any kind, urban or rural, folk or popular, genuine or simulated. Roy Harris, in short, was living refutation of Dvořák's principles.

He propounded this idea explicitly in "The Growth of a Composer," a short article or manifesto he published in the *Musical Quarterly* in April 1934, in the very wake of the "big symphony from the West." It begins with a declaration that "the creative impulse is a desire to capture and communicate ... the atavistic burgeonings from the depth of the race-soul,"[58] and ends with a warning that only by maintaining his personal integrity does a composer stand "a good chance of creating music that will be true to his race, to his time, to himself."[59] The extent to which he achieves "an understandable race-expression" will determine "whether he represents a small community, a nation, or mankind."[60] But the means to this achievement lie entirely within the individual creative imagination. A true symbiosis between art and life cannot be mediated by prefabricated (limited and limiting) artifacts, only by a boundless inner process of abstraction Harris calls "metabolism":

> With each successive study (in melody, harmony, counterpoint, form, instrumentation), he creates a new life for himself. He goes along the streets, in subways, on hiking trips, he talks to people, at the same time seeing, hearing, analyzing, drawing melodic contours, weaving harmonic textures, fashioning contrapuntal designs and patterns, mixing orchestral timbres. Music becomes to him a

plastic language of shapes and forms, colors and intensities. Music creates a new world for him, it offers him a new acting philosophy of positive values which he can isolate, examine, and mold. [61]

The next year, Harris put these theories into practice with *A Farewell to Pioneers: Symphonic Elegy*, his first work to embody a program that drew openly, rather than implicitly, on the mythology of the American West. He billed it as

a tribute to a passing generation of Americans to which my own father and mother belong. Theirs was the last generation to affirm and live by the pioneer standards of frontiersmen. They were born of and taught by a race of men and women who seemed to crave the tang of conquering wildernesses and wresting abundance from virgin soil. [62]

They were, in a word, "autogenetic." Accordingly, Harris constructed the melodies of this composition to reflect their questing, self-fashioning spirit—and something else as well. In a letter to a pupil who studied with him in the early 1940s, Harris described the theme shown in Ex. 11-13b as embodying "a gentle variation of both pitch and rhythm design so subtly conceived that the auditor is gradually and almost imperceptibly led onward and onward into fresh and new fields of melody." Analogies are drawn now not only to the American character but to the American land—the land of "wide open spaces," to be evoked locally, in melodies like this, by the use of ever-widening intervals (but without any literal repetition), and globally by a systematically ascending ("heliotropic") tessitura. The syncopated rhythms, which Harris took pains never to associate with jazz, reflected, he averred, "our [i.e., American] unsymmetrically balanced melodies (difficult to harmonize with prepared cadences) and our national aversion to anything final, our hope and search for more satisfying conclusions." The opening melody in *Farewell to Pioneers* (Ex. 11-13c) epitomizes everything Harris sought to project as Western-American. Each of its well-demarcated phrases can be read as an autogenic variation of its immediate predecessor (which means, ultimately, of the first phrase). There is no repetition, only forward progression toward the melody's "manifest destiny." The range of the melody widens systematically, eventually to cover more than two octaves. But also note that from the trumpet entry in m. 11 to the end of the flute's first phrase in m. 18, the melody adheres to a pentatonic scale. That is the stuff of folklore, Dvořák territory after all. Its inexorable seepage into Harris's work presages the next (and controversial) stage in the evolution of "Americanist" concert music.

ex. 11-13b Roy Harris, "autogenetic" melodies, from *A Farewell to Pioneers* (1935)

ex. 11-13c Roy Harris, "autogenetic" melodies, *A Farewell to Pioneers*, opening melody

Harris's greatest success as an emblematic American came in February 1939, with the premiere (in Boston, naturally, under Koussevitzky) of his Third Symphony. Like many early-twentieth-century symphonies, perhaps most conspicuously the Seventh (1924) by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius (1865–1957), then heralded as the greatest living symphonist, it is a sort of programless symphonic poem, in a single movement but with relatively autonomous sections in contrasting tempos.

Or is it programless? A note by the composer for the first performance purported to outline its form, but contained a certain amount of expressive characterization as well (implying, perhaps, that the two were not to be regarded as separable). Measure numbers have been added to Harris's outline as given here to facilitate comparison with the score; also compare Ex. 11-14.

- I. Tragic—low string sonorities. [to m. 138]

- II. Lyric—strings, horns, woodwinds. [mm. 139–208]

- III. Pastoral—woodwinds with a polytonal string background. [209–415]

- IV. Fugue—dramatic.

  - A. Brass-percussion dominating [416–504]
  - B. Canonic development of materials from Section II constituting background for further development of Fugue. [505–566]

- V. Dramatic-Tragic.

  - A. Restatement of violin theme of Section I: tutti stringsbrass and percussion developing rhythmic motif from climax of Section IV. [567–633]
  - B. Coda—development of materials from Sections I and II over pedal timpani. [634–703(end)]

This much was enough to prompt speculation on the part of one critic that, in its uncompromising seriousness, the symphony spoke "of the bleak and barren expanses of Western Kansas, of the brooding prairie night,"[63] and for another critic to assert (in a more "technical" vein) that "although there is no direct use of folksong in this work, the melodic content is clearly rooted in idealized hymnal and secular folk idioms." There is as little evidence for the one conclusion as for the other; on the contrary, what evidence

there is indicates that Harris's "hymnic" style was based on a study of Gregorian chant and medieval organum. But both assumptions were understandable and in a way justifiable, even if the most tangible model remained Sibelius, a European.

The lofty rhetorical tone of the Harris Third—in particular, the sense of high peroration as Section IV-B gives way to V-A (Ex. 11-15), with its recapitulation of the "Tragic" violin theme from Section I (another good example of "autogenetic" melody) as a stately dirge in doubled note-values and "heliotropic" upward transposition, its formality underscored by its canonic treatment—made it impressive and gave the "symphonic" manner renewed influence. Sibelius, while acknowledged (especially by American critics) as legitimate heir to the romantic symphonic tradition, was widely regarded as the last of a dying breed; by many Europeans, indeed, he was already thought of as a sort of dinosaur. He had not produced a new symphony in fifteen years; although he lived to the age of ninety-one, he would never do so. His unironized rhetorical eloquence suffered in the general postwar atmosphere of disillusion. Although his later symphonies were decidedly restrained compared with his prewar output, they bore a suspicious taint of bombast.

ex. 11-14 Roy Harris, Symphony no. 3, excerpts demonstrating the main themes: I. Tragic, II. Lyric, III. Pastoral, and IV. Fugue

ex. 11-15 Roy Harris, Symphony no. 3, 6 after fig. 56

Virgil Thomson, just back from Paris in his first year as a professional music critic, administered a calculated shock to the American musical establishment in the very first review he published in the *New York Herald Tribune* by declaring Sibelius "vulgar, self-indulgent and provincial beyond all description."[64] Yet even Thomson, orthodox product that he was of the Boulangerie, found himself a bit cowed by Harris, the Boulangerie's most conspicuous renegade, who had so adroitly and, it seems, sincerely captured the mood or self-image of America in depression time—one of ingenuous idealism and commitment. Thomson could wanly note that Harris's rhetoric "invites kidding"[65] and offer some mild reproof: "one would think, to read his prefaces, that he had been awarded by God, or at least by popular vote, a monopolistic privilege of expressing our nation's deepest ideals and highest aspirations."

But he dared not kid the music. On the contrary, he praised it precisely for avoiding, "as if it were of the devil, any colorful accent whatsoever," and for achieving, at its best, an expressive amplitude that has "exactly as much to do with America as mountains or mosquitoes or childbirth have, none of which is anybody's property and none of which has any ethnic significance whatsoever."[66] All of which made Roy Harris's music,

and the Third Symphony in particular, "America's most popular (and most exportable) single expression in symphonic form." As evidence of its exportability, and also of the hope that it inspired, one could cite the wondering reactions of many Europeans, not used to taking America seriously as a producer of "important" symphonic music. Italy's Alfredo Casella, for one example: "In producing a composer such as this master, America has placed herself in the front rank amongst those nations who are concerned with building a music for the future."[67]

In Harris's wake, and largely on his legitimizing prestige, a distinctive "school" of American symphonic writing flourished during the depression years. It was borne aloft by a government-subsidized proliferation of orchestras administered by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), part of President Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal," a policy of fighting unemployment with government spending, and it maintained a high profile well into the 1960s. Its other titular head was Howard Hanson (1896–1981), a Nebraska-born composer of Scandinavian ancestry who, even before Harris, had accepted Sibelius as his chief symphonic model. Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony commissioned from Hanson two symphonies, the Second ("Romantic," 1930) and the Third (1938), which could be taken equally with Harris's as exemplifying the high symphonic rhetoric of depression-era America, replete with "heliotropisms" (see the horn countermelody in Ex. 11-16). But Harris was the one by whom (or on behalf of whom) the style was explicitly invested with national significance.

As early as 1924, Hanson was appointed director of the newly established Eastman School of Music, a conservatory endowed by George Eastman (the "Kodak" camera manufacturer) and affiliated with the University of Rochester in upstate New York. He held the post for forty years, during which time the Eastman School became a focal point for what might be called the American neoromantic style. Another institutional base was established for it when William Schuman (1910–92), a pupil of Harris, was appointed president of the Juilliard School of Music in New York, America's most distinguished conservatory, in 1945.

Schuman had scored a big public and critical success with his Symphony No. 3 (1941), a massively energetic work in two composite neobaroque movements (Passacaglia and Fugue, Chorale and Toccata). Similarly large and affirmative was the Third Symphony (1947) by Walter Piston (1894–1976), a charter member along with Copland and Thomson of the Boulangerie. Its character, so similar to that of Hanson's, Harris's, and Schuman's "Thirds," suggests that the American symphonists of the "WPA School" still saw themselves in a line that extended back to Beethoven: a Third Symphony had to be an "Eroica." All of these symphonies were accepted as "Americanist" on the strength of stylistic features they all shared with Harris's Third: melodic breadth; a basically diatonic (though often dissonant) harmonic idiom; "asymmetrical" rhythm; sonorous, often percussion-heavy orchestration. With one conspicuous exception to be described later, none employed folk tunes or otherwise "marked" material to establish their national character.

ex. 11-16 Howard Hanson, Symphony no. 2, motto theme

The vitality of the school can be measured by the high productivity of its members: Harris produced thirteen symphonies over the course of his career, Schumann ten, Piston eight, Hanson six. Roger Sessions (1896–1985), who stood somewhat aloof from the other composers named so far thanks to a somewhat more chromatic, more "internationalist" style, was nevertheless an enthusiastic symphonist in a manner that would have been far more unusual in a European composer (except in Russia). He and Peter Mennin (1923–83), a younger member of the group who had studied with Hanson at the Eastman School and who succeeded Schuman as president of the Juilliard School, each logged a "classic" Beethovenian nine.

Notes:

(52) John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1931), p. 572; quoted in Beth E. Levy, "'The White Hope of American Music'; or, How Roy Harris Became Western," *American Music* XIX (2001): 161n1.

(53) Nicolas Slonimsky, "Roy Harris: The Story of an Oklahoma Composer Who Was Born in a Log Cabin on

Lincoln's Birthday" (unpublished MS at the Music Division, Library of Congress); quoted in Levy, "White Hope," p. 137.

(54) Roy Harris, "Perspective at 40," *The Magazine of Art* XXXII, no. 11 (Nov. 1939): 667; quoted in Beth E. Levy, "Frontier Figures: American Music and the Mythology of the American West, 1895–1945" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2002), p. 108.

(55) Arthur Mendel, "Music: A Change in Structure," *The Nation*, 6 January 1932; quoted in Levy, *Frontier Figures*, p. 152.

(56) Slonimsky, "From the West: Composer New to Bostonians," *Boston Evening Transcript* 24 January 1934; quoted in Levy, "White Hope," p. 146.

(57) Levy, "White Hope," p. 148.

(58) Roy Harris, "The Growth of a Composer," *Musical Quarterly* XX (1934): 188.

(59) *Ibid.*, p. 191.

(60) *Ibid.*, p. 188, 191.

(61) *Ibid.*, pp. 189–90.

(62) Program note for the Philadelphia première; quoted in Levy, *Frontier Figures*, p. 154.

(63) George Henry Lovett Smith, "American Festival in Boston," *Modern Music* XVII, no. 1 (October–November 1939): 44.

(64) Virgil Thomson, "Age without Honor," *New York Herald Tribune*, 11 October 1940; rpt. in Virgil Thomson, *Music Reviewed 1940–1954* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 4.

(65) Virgil Thomson, "Music from Chicago" (21 November 1940); *Music Reviewed*, p, 15.

(66) *Ibid.*, p. 16.

(67) Quoted in Moore, *Yankee Blues*, p. 163.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Folk music

Marc Blitzstein

Composers' Collective of New York

Aaron Copland

FERMENT ON THE LEFT

Chapter: CHAPTER 11 In Search of the "Real" America
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

But by the mid-1940s the idea of the All-American (but ethnically unmarked) Symphony as optimum embodiment of the American character had received a powerful challenge from what might be called a resurgent Dvořák faction, yet one colored by contemporary circumstances in a manner that Dvořák never envisioned, and would have surely deprecated. The early 1930s witnessed a renewed interest in American white folklore from the perspective of radical politics, which received a major impetus from the depression, particularly in connection with the labor movement. Folk music, now regarded as the product of the American "proletariat," was researched and performed as an adjunct to political action. It was adopted (and often radically adapted) as agitation and propaganda on behalf of the farmers and workers who were most sorely affected by the economic downturn.

The folk music revival did not immediately affect the composition of "art" music. At first, composers of leftist persuasion modeled their activity on that of their German counterparts like Kurt Weill and Hanns Eisler, as described in chapter 9. Marc Blitzstein (1905–64), the most notable example, was a Philadelphia-born composer whose European study tour took him both to Fontainebleau and the Boulangerie and to Berlin, where he worked briefly with Schoenberg and heard Weill and Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* in its first production. (It would be in Blitzstein's translation that the piece became so popular in America in the 1950s.) Encouraged by the exiled Brecht, whom he met in New York in 1935, Blitzstein composed *The Cradle Will Rock*, a "play in music" (to his own libretto) in ten scenes embodying what the composer called "an allegory about people I hate"[68] that would through a combination of entertainment and political harangue persuade its intended middle-class audience to join the class struggle on the side of the proletariat—or as Blitzstein put it, "to shove those into the progressive ranks who stood on the brink."[69]

fig. 11-8 Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* in rehearsal. The composer is squatting at right.

The work focuses a general critique of "prostitution" in all walks of American life on an episode involving labor agitation in a place called Steeltown, U.S.A. A group of "upright citizens," all of them in thrall to Mr. Mister, the steelmill boss and the cartoon personification of capitalist evil, have been mistakenly arrested as union organizers, along with one actual (that is, literal) prostitute, a streetwalker named Moll, who is of course the play's only "innocent." One by one the remaining characters—a minister (Reverend Salvation), a newspaperman (Editor Daily), a college president (President Prexy), a doctor (Dr. Specialist), and so on—reveal their servile hypocrisy. In the end the righteous workers, led by Larry Foreman the union man, gain the inevitable victory over the forces of reaction.

Among the "prostitutes" are Yasha and Dauber, a pair of artists, who depend on the "cultured" Mrs. Mister, the boss's wife, for patronage. (She summons them with an automobile horn that plays a snatch from Beethoven's supposedly "revolutionary" *Egmont* Overture.) They sing a duet called "Art for Art's Sake" that, in a manner typical of the day, pits ethics against esthetics. A paean to "pure" classical (or neoclassical) art as then trumpeted, above all, by Stravinsky, the duet indicts artists who in their social indifference serve the interests of the exploiting class. *The Cradle Will Rock* achieved a much greater notoriety than expected owing to the circumstances of its first performance, on 17 June 1937. It had been commissioned through the Federal Theatre Project, an arm of the Works Progress Administration; but on the very eve of the premiere, the government contract was rescinded on account of the adverse publicity the work's supposedly subversive character was generating, and the theater was locked. The whole cast, along with the audience, walked to another theater a mile away. The actors' and musicians' unions, fearing reprisals, forbade their members to appear onstage or in the pit at the new venue, so Blitzstein, with the stage to himself, played the score on the piano, while the singers and actors, scattered throughout the auditorium in street dress, performed their roles from their seats. They made theater history, and established the work's performance tradition; it is

usually presented as it was on its nearly-thwarted opening night. The full score, it seems, has never been performed.

The cast party afterward took place at the Downtown Music School, a community educational facility administered by the Workers Music League, an adjunct of the American Communist Party, and under its discipline. (That discipline, of course, was international; it was channeled through the so-called Comintern, or Third Communist International Organization, which by the 1930s was an agency of the foreign policy of the USSR.) Among the other organizations the League sponsored was the Composers Collective of New York, a club modeled loosely on the Russian Union of Soviet Composers, where creative musicians met to exchange ideas, hear and critique each other's work, and publish anthologies of labor songs.

Determining its actual membership, or that of any radical political action group in Depression-era America, is difficult now. During the Cold War, when tensions mounted between the United States and Soviet Russia, rival superpowers capable of "mutual assured destruction," membership or former membership in the American Communist Party (driven underground between 1946 and 1966) or any of its affiliated organizations became cause for suspicion and possible legal persecution. As we shall see later, members and sympathizers of the Composers Collective endured reprisals in the 1950s for their idealistic political sympathies in the 1930s.

Many sought protection in denial, or in the exercise of their constitutional right to avoid self-incrimination; to reveal their participation, and even to assert that it had a direct and historically significant impact on their musical output, would at one time have been a hostile and potentially injurious act. Even now such disclosures are unjustly regarded by many, across the political spectrum, as defamatory. But that makes the irony of the situation—that important features of the American national identity in music originated in circumstances that would later be branded "Un-American"—all the more poignant, and all the more needful of elucidation.

The members of the Composers Collective who can be most conclusively identified are the ones who operated within the organization under cover of Party ("revolutionary") pseudonyms. They included Charles Seeger (1886–1979), a minor composer but a very distinguished musicologist, who went by the name Carl Sands, and Elie Siegmeister (1909–91), a recent product of the Boulangerie, whose *nom de guerre* was L. E. Swift. Blitzstein, who boldly used his own name, was listed in official publications as the organization's secretary. The Collective's most concrete musical legacy was the *Workers' Songbook*, two volumes of "mass songs" (agitation-and-propaganda songs to be sung by amateur choruses in unison or as rounds), issued in 1934 and 1935. The Collective also sponsored concerts devoted largely, but not solely, to the performance of such works.

One such concert, presented in March 1934 at the organization's New York headquarters, called the Degeyter Club (after Pierre Degeyter, a French woodcarver who in 1888 had composed the music to the Communist hymn "Internationale"), was Aaron Copland's first "one-man show," the first full-length program anywhere devoted exclusively to his music. Since his abortive jazz experiments, Copland had been writing in an abstractly modernistic and decidedly "urban" idiom unmarked by any specifically Americanist coloration. The program presented by the Collective included a two-piano arrangement of the jazzy Concerto with Copland as the soloist; an early piano Passacaglia; a pair of pieces ("Nocturne" and "Ukelele Serenade") for violin and piano; a piano trio (1928) based on a Yiddish theme, called "Vitebsk" after one of the major centers of Eastern European Jewry; and—the most recent composition, as well as the most abstract one—a rigorously worked-out and aggressively dissonant set of *Piano Variations* (1930; the opening bars or "theme" is given in Ex. 11-17).

Seeger reviewed the concert in the *Daily Worker*, the Communist Party newspaper, and hailed Copland's new sound, equating musical with political militancy as was then the fashion among artists with leftist leanings but elite training. Thanks to its uncompromising dissonance and its use of quarter tones, even the "Vitebsk" trio was seen as politically progressive despite its incorporation of what might otherwise have looked like religious subject matter, normally equated by Communists with reactionary politics. Allowing himself some chronological liberty, Seeger charted Copland's course as moving steadily and inevitably

leftward:

> From the "genteel seclusion" of the earlier works, through an intermediate stage of almost religious rage or, better, rage at religion, and of a flirtation with Broadway, he emerged by 1930 as the composer of one of the most undeniably revolutionary pieces of music ever produced here—the Piano Variations. That he was not "conscious" of this at the time he wrote the work is merely to say that in 1930 he had progressed further in musical than in language development.[70]

ex. 11-17 Aaron Copland, *Piano Variations* (theme)

The last comment was a reference to a disclaimer Copland had made before the concert, which, Seeger contended, had been disproved not only by the music but also by an exchange he had in a follow-up discussion period, during which a steelworker had commented that the *Piano Variations* reminded him of his work environment. Copland replied that, while he had not imagined "riveters and subways" while composing, he did write the piece over the noise of a New York street, and felt that his music was therefore "able to stand up against modern life." That gave Seeger the grounds for a ringing peroration:

> For one of the finest definitions of revolutionary musical content yet made, we hail Aaron Copland's "Up Against!" And with vigor, too—that is the essence of the Piano Variations. Their chief shortcomings seem to be that they are almost too much "against"—against pretty nearly everything. So some day, Aaron, write us something "for." You know what for![71]

Although it would be rash to offer this one incident as an explanation, it is nevertheless telling that, beginning exactly then, in the spring and summer of 1934, positive political commitment shows up in Copland's work (and in other public activities as well: during that summer he made speeches on behalf of Communist politicians in Minnesota, and campaigned for the Communist presidential ticket in 1936). In the fall of 1934, he wrote a one-act ballet called *Hear Ye! Hear Ye!* that in Blitzsteinesque fashion satirizes an obviously corrupt American courtroom at a time when the Communist Party was actively engaged in protesting such miscarriages of justice as the trial of the "Scottsboro boys," nine black youths in Alabama who had been tried and, with one exception, convicted and condemned on trumped-up charges of rape in 1931. (Their appeals continued until 1937 so that the case was still in the news.) The score, which incorporates an orchestrated version of the "Ukelele Serenade," begins and ends with a dissonant parody of the "Star-Spangled Banner."

In 1935, Copland completed a set of short symphonic studies called *Statements for Orchestra*, of which several ("Militant," "Dogmatic," "Jingo") simulated political oratory, and in one case parodied it, thus giving an ideological focus (as Seeger had "demanded") to Copland's aggressive modernism. The "Dogmatic" statement actually quotes the theme of the *Piano Variations* as its middle section, not in self-parody (for Communists, like religious fundamentalists, used the word "dogma" without irony), but as if spelling out the content that Seeger had discerned in it the year before. The parody item is the "Jingo" statement. The word, no longer much in use, was slang for a blustery chauvinist or warmonger; the music (replete with brainless

"polytonal" quotations from "The Sidewalks of New York," a song often appropriated by New York "machine" politicians for campaign purposes) is a send-up of the sort of American patriotic rhetoric—the "Fourth of July" rhetoric Charles Ives nostalgically idealized (see chapter 5)—that was derided by the left in those days as a mask for political reaction.

Copland's most direct response to his reception at the Degeyter Club, however, was a contribution to the genre that the organization sponsored: a mass song called "Into the Streets, May First!" (Ex. 11-18). It was the winning entry in a contest sponsored by the *New Masses*, another Communist organ, for the best setting of a poem for May Day, the international workers' holiday. Copland's song was performed at an exercise called the "Second Annual American Workers' Music Olympiad," published in the paper's 1 May edition, reprinted that August in *Sovetskaya muzïka*, the organ of the Union of Soviet Composers, and reissued the next year in the second volume of the *Workers' Songbook*, alongside works by "Sands," "Swift," Wallingford Riegger (using the pseudonym "J. C. Richards"), the Soviet mass song specialist Alexander Davidenko, and Hanns Eisler, the acknowledged master of the genre (see chapter 9), who had just come to America as a refugee from the Nazi regime and given some seminars on mass songs at the Degeyter Club.

ex. 11-18 Aaron Copland, "Into the Streets, May First!"

Copland's song exemplifies the position he had staked out when reviewing the first volume of the *Workers' Songbook* in *The New Masses*, a month after winning the contest. Perhaps responding to some misgivings Seeger had expressed when his rather "difficult" song was picked as the winner, Copland addressed the problem of an appropriate style for proletarian art. He conceded that "to write a fine mass song is a challenge to every composer," and that for the sake of achieving "a first-line position on the cultural front" some stylistic compromise was both necessary and well compensated, "for every participant in revolutionary activity knows from his own experience that a good mass song is a powerful weapon in the class struggle."[72]

And yet he did not hesitate to criticize the songs on "aesthetic" grounds, calling the work of one Collective member "flatfooted and unimaginative," and that of another "unnecessarily conventional in spirit." He argued against excessive simplicity or familiarity in style, since (as Seeger himself had claimed) revolutionary content demanded a revolutionary style, even within the limits set by the abilities and experience of amateur performers. He had traditional Communist theory on his side: both folklore (a remnant of "feudalism") and commercial music ("jazz") were considered reactionary political expressions by

the orthodox. This was the position adopted in the USSR by the radical Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM). Within the Collective, Eisler and Blitzstein preached vehemently against employing idioms that were tainted by capitalist exploitation.

In his own song Copland strove to maintain a striking modern idiom, full of unexpected modulations and pungent harmonies, while staying within the capacities of amateur performers. Each phrase of the melody is diatonic and largely conjunct. Motion between phrases (that is, over tonal modulations) is always conjunct until the last eight measures, which remain within the confines of C major. The tune is expertly crafted to produce a steady rise in tessitura, each succeeding phrase hitting a higher climax than the last. It was a fine specimen of its type, at least theoretically, and was chosen unanimously by the Collective membership (including Eisler) to be its standard bearer.

But traditional Communist esthetic theory was just then being subjected to a massive review that would ultimately doom both the Collective and its approved "revolutionary" style. The first inkling of the change was the way in which Michael Gold, a proletarian writer who had a regular column called "Change the World!" in the *Daily Worker*, reacted to Elie Siegmeister's setting of his "Strange Funeral in Braddock," an angry lament for the victim of a horrifying steel mill accident who had to be buried encased in a block of steel that had spilled over him in its molten state. Siegmeister had sought to express the fury of Gold's poem in a typically modernist way, with dissonant tone-clusters in the piano part and operatic *parlando* effects in the voice. Performed at a New York concert in December 1935, the song was well received by critics and was soon published in Henry Cowell's *New Music Quarterly*, but Gold savagely attacked it in the *Daily Worker*: "I think a new content often demands a new form, but when the new form gets so far ahead of all of us that we can't understand its content, it is time to write letters to the press."[73]

Gold demanded that workers' music henceforth adopt rural folk music as its primary model, citing as precedent the activity of Joe Hill (Joseph Hillstrom, 1879–1915), Ella May Wiggins (martyred by a mob in 1929), and Aunt Molly (Mary) Jackson (1880–1960), union organizers who used folk-song parodies and original songs in traditional style—for example, Hill's popular "Casey Jones," a call to railway workers—as agitational propaganda. It was hard to argue with Gold's position from within the movement: Hill and Wiggins, actual victims in the struggle for workers' and farmers' rights, were hallowed names on the left. And yet it might have seemed a somewhat paradoxical or quixotic demand, given that most industrial workers were urban and many of them foreign-born. But Gold was not speaking only for himself. He was expressing a new Party line.

fig. 11-9 Earl Robinson, "Joe Hill," as it appears in *The Fireside Book of Folk Songs*, ed. Margaret B. Boni (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947).

Notes:

(68) Marc Blitzstein, "City College Presents 'Cradle Will Rock' Tonight," *Daily Worker*, 29 November 1940; Barbara Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), p. 211.

(69) Edith Hale, "Author and Composer Blitzstein," *Daily Worker*, 7 December 1938; *Ibid*.

(70) "Carl Sands" (Charles Seeger), "Copeland's [*sic*] Music Recital at Pierre Degeyter Club," *Daily Worker*, 22 March 1934; Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, p. 275.

(71) *Ibid*.

(72) Aaron Copland, "Workers Sing!" *New Masses* XI, no. 9 (1934): 28–29.

(73) Quoted in Ronald D. Cohen and Dave Samuelson, *Songs for Political Action: Folk Music, Topical Songs and the American Left* (Hambergen: Bear Family Records, 1996), p. 67.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

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Nationalism: 20th-century Americanism

Virgil Thomson

"TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICANISM"

Chapter: CHAPTER 11 In Search of the "Real" America
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

When the Soviet leadership liquidated both the RAPM and its modernist rival, the Association for Contemporary Music, and replaced them with the Union of Soviet Composers in 1932 (a story that will be more fully told in chapter 13), it prescribed a compromise between their positions: a professional contemporary art music that would remain accessible to workers and peasants because it would draw on familiar folk and popular idioms. Stalin himself summed up the new ideal in a phrase, "an art national in form and socialist in content."[74] Seeger paraphrased it slightly in the *Daily Worker* when he called for a music that was "national in form, proletarian in content."[75]

This line was exported to Communist parties throughout the world as part of an overall policy known as the Popular Front, announced by Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian-born General Secretary of the Comintern, at its Seventh Congress held in Moscow in August 1935. In an effort to unite the left against the rise of fascism in Germany, and thereby promote the security of the Soviet Union, Communist parties were instructed to form alliances and coalitions with more moderate, nonrevolutionary progressive or liberal groups, and to shift their tactics from an appeal to international working-class solidarity to one that invoked national or patriotic resistance against the foreign fascist threat.

To achieve these aims, Communist parties would have to look less "foreign" themselves. They would need to soft-pedal their international ties (in the first place to Moscow) and emphasize their indigenous roots. They would have to stop using the international jargon of political radicalism and start couching their doctrines in terms familiar to those they sought to persuade. That is exactly what Mike Gold was calling for when he rejected the musical radicalism of Siegmeister's *Strange Funeral in Braddock* and asserted the need for a popular musical idiom to clothe revolutionary messages.

On the face of it, the American Communist Party had an easier task than most in implementing Popular Front directives, since it could draw directly on the revolutionary founding myth of the United States. At its nominating convention in June 1936, the Party adopted the slogan "Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism." A pamphlet with that title by Earl Browder, the Party's general secretary and candidate for president, supported the motto with adroitly culled "revolutionary" quotations from the founding fathers (especially Jefferson) and above all from Abraham Lincoln, whose mythic status as the Great Emancipator fit in with the Communist stake in the struggle for racial as well as social justice.

One such quote, from Lincoln's First Inaugural Address, became the basis for an immensely popular "ballad" by Earl Robinson (1910–91), the youngest member of the Composers Collective, one of the few who favored a folkloristic idiom even before the Popular Front directives came down. A classically trained pianist and violinist who studied composition with Eisler and Copland, Robinson taught himself guitar in 1934 and began performing as a "troubadour" at political meetings, providing a model for Charles Seeger's son Peter (or Pete, b. 1919) a Harvard dropout whose distinguished career as a folksinger and political songwriter began around 1941.

Robinson's *Abe Lincoln* was a remarkable stylistic synthesis: its verse alluded to the style and structure of a folk or country (i.e., pre-"jazz") blues, an African American genre, while its refrain embodied the march

cadence of an Eisler *Kampflied* or socialist "fight song" (see chapter 9), all tinged with catchy American colloquialisms in the rhythm of its text-setting to imprint Lincoln's "revolutionary" message in the singers' memories. One of the earliest musical by-products of the Popular Front, Robinson's song was a masterpiece of agitational propaganda.

Abe Lincoln settled the stylistic matter as far as the Communist Party was concerned, and put the Composers Collective out of business. The former members, to a greater or lesser extent, all began to incorporate American rural folklore into their creative work, whether through actual quotation or in the guise of "neonationalism," the abstraction of its stylistic features into a personal expressive idiom. In a pamphlet, *Music and Society*, published in 1938, a chastened Elie Siegmeister wrote that the task of the contemporary composer must be that of "breaking down the age-old division between learned or art music on the one hand, and folk or popular music on the other," for "in doing this he will be helping to break down the class division which these musical divisions have symbolized and helped to perpetuate."[76]

No other composer on the left, however, equaled Robinson's feat of actually composing a folk song—that is, writing a song that became accepted into the American oral tradition and sung by multitudes who did not know its origin. Robinson's *Joe Hill*, set to a poem by a Communist journalist named Alfred Hayes (who also wrote the words to Copland's *Into the Streets, May First!*) and first published in the *Daily Worker* in 1936, passed from mouth to mouth at union meetings and on picket lines, went overseas with the American volunteers who fought under the banner of the "Abraham Lincoln Brigade" in the Spanish Civil War, and even turned up, sung by Joan Baez (b. 1941), a latter-day political troubadour, at the Woodstock Music and Arts Fair, an enormous outdoor festival of folk and popular music, in August 1969, whence it experienced a new round of "folk" currency.

Fig. 11-3 shows the song as it appears in *The Fireside Book of Folk Songs*, a mass-marketed anthology (ed. Margaret B. Boni) published in 1947. The music is attributed to Robinson, but the words are unattributed. The composer, in a half-proud, half-rueful memoir, recalled seeing it published in a labor songbook with the legend, "Words: Earl Robinson, Music: Traditional."[77] An anthology called *Songs That Changed the World* (ed. Wanda W. Whitman; New York, 1969), published in the wake of the Woodstock Festival, called it, simply, "the 'spiritual' of the union movement." By then it had even found its way back into serious, scholarly, "field-collected" folklore anthologies.

In other words, it joined the contents of the sort of book that, with the Popular Front directives in mind, composers who had been writing mass songs began consulting for models and actual melodies. The earliest such popular anthology, *The American Songbag*, was published in 1927 by Carl Sandburg (1878–1967), a newspaperman and poet and sometime socialist politician (and the author of a monumental biography of Lincoln), who played the guitar after a fashion and liked to end his public readings with songs. During the depression years there was, predictably, an explosion of publications of this type, culminating in a vastly enlarged 1938 reissue of John A. Lomax's classic anthology *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910), revised in collaboration with the compiler's son Alan Lomax (1915–2002), who went on to become the century's foremost collector of American folk songs.

Even before that, the father-son team had issued a popular collection, *American Ballads and Folksongs* (1934) that follows the example of the original Lomax publication by furnishing piano accompaniments to the songs as an aid to popularization. Southern Baptist hymnody or "Sacred Harp" singing was popularized by the literary historian George Pullen Jackson in *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, a treatise illustrated with settings drawn from early-nineteenth-century hymnbooks. Another collection based on early published sources (also by a literary historian) was S. Foster Damon's *Series of Old American Songs* (1936–37), an annotated collection in facsimile of one hundred American folk and popular songs from before the Civil War.

Elie Siegmeister, formerly of the Composers Collective, came out with an anthology of his own (*Treasury of American Song*, edited with Olin Downes) in 1940. The book became the basis for a Broadway musical, *Sing Out Sweet Land!*, in 1944. By then, white rural folk song had been "mainstreamed" into American popular culture, no longer associated exclusively or automatically with protest movements or the political left. But

the political origins of the folklore movement in the Popular Front are still reflected, if only vestigially, in the show's authorship.

The same can be said about the absorption of rural folklore into the concert repertory. The earliest, somewhat isolated instance was Virgil Thomson's *Symphony on a Hymn Tune* (1928), the first American symphony to emerge from the Boulangerie. A compositional tour de force in that its four traditional movements were all based on a single melody (*How Firm a Foundation*, a hymn of Scottish origin with which Southern Baptists traditionally brought their convocations to a close), it eschewed the Germanic technique of motivic extraction and transformation ("developmental" writing, as it was then called) in favor of the more harmonically static or "polytonal" collage techniques that, as shown in chapter 10, were associated with French surrealism. As in *Four Saints in Three Acts*, the opera sampled there, Thomson laced his music with deliberate commonplaces and mock-realistic touches, like the doubling of lines in near-octaves that call to mind the sound of malfunctioning organs (Ex. 11-19).

ex. 11-19 Virgil Thomson, *Symphony on a Hymn Tune*

Although, as Thomson told a biographer, he meant the symphony to be "an ambitious and noble work," he encountered the same difficulty with it that Satie faced when he meant to be serious. His commonplaces were heard as parodies or arch "wrong-note" effects, which prevented the work from meeting the expectations of the traditional audience he was addressing the way Harris's heroic symphonies eventually would. Nor could a music so deliberately refined and esoteric serve the socially utilitarian purposes promoted on the American left during the depression years.

Eventually Thomson shelved it and reused parts of it a decade later to represent the Old South in a documentary film score (*The River*, 1937) commissioned by the United States government through the WPA, to accompany a stern propaganda film directed by poet turned documentary film maker Pare Lorentz (1905–92) that showed the sorry aftermath of floods on the Mississippi caused by greedy exploitation of the land, and made a pitch for the Roosevelt administration's public works programs that many were resisting as "socialistic." All at once the seemingly trivial symphony of 1928 had "social significance," to cite a catchphrase of the thirties. Elsewhere Thomson used southern hymns procured for him by George Pullen Jackson.

The River was Thomson's second government commission. The first was for a score to accompany an earlier Lorentz documentary, *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, on the effects of soil erosion. For one section, Thomson contrived a collage of three cowboy songs—"Houlihan" (a.k.a. "I Ride an Old Paint"), "Git Along Little Dogies," "The Streets of Laredo"—from the 1934 Lomax anthology. As a movement in an orchestral suite drawn from the movie score and first performed in 1936, it marked the first use of specifically Western-American folklore by a composer in the Euro-American "art" tradition—the first of many.

The most successful and lasting ones were by Aaron Copland. The first dated from 1936, the same year as *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, when Copland was commissioned by the Henry Street Settlement, a New York child welfare organization that had recently sponsored a performance of Weill and Brecht's *Der Jasager* (see chapter 9), to write a "school opera" in a similar didactic vein. The opera, called *The Second Hurricane*, concerns a group of stranded schoolchildren who learn cooperation in the face of danger. Siegmeister, in his Popular Front tract, praised it alongside works of "social music" by Shostakovich, Blitzstein, and Eisler as "a

children's opera teaching solidarity."[78] Their socialization having been accomplished, the children keep their spirits up while waiting to be rescued by joining in a singing game based on "The Capture of Burgoyne" (1777), an "excellent revolutionary song"[79] (in the compiler's words) that Copland found in Damon's *Old American Songs*. It forms the musical climax of the play.

The Second Hurricane was first performed at the Settlement Music School in April 1937. Three months later, another work commissioned in 1936 was first performed, this time over the radio. Copland was one of six composers who had been invited by the CBS network to write orchestral pieces for national broadcast. His working title was *Radio Serenade*, but to stimulate interest in the program the network substituted the generic name *Music for Radio*, and announced that the piece had a secret program that listeners were invited to guess by proposing titles, the winning entry to be selected by the composer. In this way the piece became known as *Saga of the Prairie*, the winning listener (a housewife named Ruth Leonhardt) having been reminded of "the intense courage—the struggles and final triumphs—of the early settlers, the real pioneers." Copland assumed she was reacting to the clarinet solo marked "simply, in the manner of a folk song" in the 1968 published score (retitled *Prairie Journal*: Ex. 11-20).

ex. 11-20 Aaron Copland, *Prairie Journal*, clarinet solo

In an interview published in 1984, Copland identified the melody as "a cowboy tune," which made "the western titles" submitted by listeners "seem most appropriate."[80] There is no evidence from the time of the work's composition to corroborate his statement, and as a matter of fact most listeners who wrote in suggested titles having to do with the usual modernistic imagery of machinery and urban life. Howard Pollock, Copland's biographer, has suggested that the composer's recollection may have been misled by memories of the many cowboy songs that he and many others would be using in various pieces composed over the coming decade. But even if it is not an actual cowboy song, the clarinet tune does bear an authentic whiff of the kind of Anglo-American folklore that Popular Front artists were assiduously mining at the time.

What makes the folklike quality of the tune historically significant is the fact that, as Wayne Shirley of the Library of Congress discovered, the marchlike section that both precedes and follows the clarinet solo was based on an unfinished mass song Copland had composed to Langston Hughes's "Ballad of Ozie Powell," a poetic tribute to one of the Scottsboro boys whose legal fate, as of 1936, was still undecided.[81] Again we see the conjunction, previously exemplified by Earl Robinson, between the stylistic appropriation of American folklore and the political aims of the Popular Front. (Meanwhile, Robinson continued to expand his range with the "Ballad for Americans," a 1938 cantata in folk style that recounted the founding myth of the United States and related its revolutionary spirit to contemporary events; first performed on the radio with the African-American basso Paul Robeson as soloist, it achieved such popularity that it was sung at the 1940 nominating convention of the Republican Party.)

Notes:

(74) Joseph Stalin, Report to the XVI Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik); J. V. Stalin, *Works*, Vol. XII (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, *1952*) p. 379.

(75) "Carl Sands" (Charles Seeger), "Proletarian Music Is a Historical Necessity," *Daily Worker*, 6 March

1934; Zuck, *A History of Musical Americanism*, p. 123.

(76) Elie Siegmeister, *Music and Society* (New York: Critics Group Press, 1938), pp. 58–59.

(77) Earl Robinson and Eric Gordon, *Ballad of an American: The Autobiography of Earl Robinson* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997) p. 51.

(78) Siegmeister, *Music and Society*, p. 59.

(79) S. Foster Damon, *Series of Old American Songs* (Providence: Brown University Library, 1936), no. 5.

(80) Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, p. 255.

(81) Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, pp. 312–13.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Aaron Copland

Folk music

Roy Harris

PRAIRIE NEONATIONALISM

Chapter: CHAPTER 11 In Search of the "Real" America
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

"Anglo-folklorism" reached its peak, and exerted its maximum impact on the American musical mainstream, in three ballets that Copland wrote between 1938 and 1944, the most successful works of their kind since Stravinsky's prewar ballets for Diaghilev. They finally made Copland, in a succession that can be traced from Gershwin through Harris, the "exemplary" American composer, the commonly accepted (if not quite undisputed) standard bearer of musical Americanism.

The first of them, *Billy the Kid*, was commissioned by Lincoln Kirstein (1907–96), the director of a company called Ballet Caravan, who also wrote the scenario. It portrays the title character (real name William H. Bonney, 1859–81), a notorious New Mexico cattle rustler and murderer, in his legendary light as a Robin Hood (or Joe Hill) figure, his violent death at the hands of a former friend turned lawman thus becoming a martyrdom. For this ballet "Western," Copland mined the contents of several anthologies of cowboy songs that Kirstein had supplied him with. The Copland scholar Jessica Burr has demonstrated the highly imaginative way Copland fashioned his own thematic material from the songs, sometimes leaving them recognizable though changed, sometimes absorbing them into the fabric of his own music so that without the evidence of the source books they would pass undetected.[82]

Copland's basic source was *The Lonesome Cowboy*, a compilation edited by John I. White and George Shackley (New York, 1930); but as Burr discovered, he compared the settings there with others in his possession and was open to influences not only from the original tunes but from the various arrangements as well. A case in point is Copland's adaptation of "Git Along, Little Dogies," one of the most famous cowboy ballads (already used by Thomson), for the ballet's opening scene, "Street in a Frontier Town," in which Billy's mother is shot and he, avenging her, embarks on his life of crime.

In Ex. 11-21, the setting from *Lonesome Cowboy* is set, first, alongside a rather fancy harmonization of the tune from the Lomax collection by Oscar J. Fox (a separate sheet music publication in Copland's archive at the Library of Congress), and, second, alongside Copland's adaptation. Traces of both arrangements are visible in Copland's tune. The big downward leap of a ninth, Burr suggests, is Copland's response to the shout on "Whoopee" in *Lonesome Cowboy*, indicated with diamond noteheads to represent the approximate pitch (as the editors write) of "a man-sized 'Whoopee-e-e'"; and the dissonant seconds in Copland's setting are a harsher version of the appoggiaturas in Fox's accompaniment. (That Copland's first semitone clash, E♯/F♯, approximates a "blue note" as conventionally rendered by piano arrangers may well have attracted his ear, despite the resulting stylistic miscegenation.)
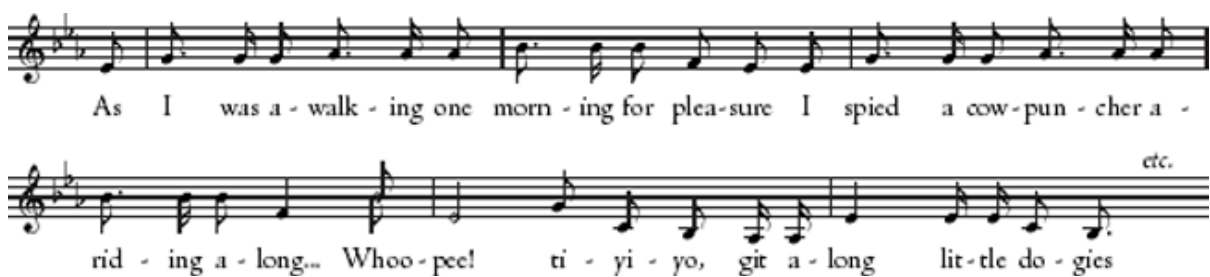
The very opening of *Billy the Kid*, with its striking "white key" or strictly diatonic dissonances, set another sort of standard for Copland's "prairie" idiom. This one reached a peak in *Rodeo*, Copland's second ballet Western, commissioned in 1942 for the choreographer Agnes de Mille by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, the successor organization to the Diaghilev Ballet. A nearly plotless, "classical" ballet or divertissement on a cowboy theme, it is devoid of the political subtexts that characterized Copland's Popular Front period. (What plot there is concerns the efforts of a hapless cowgirl to attract a beau; some found subtexts of sexual

domination here, others have found parallels with the "absent" generation of American men in the first year of wartime).

ex. 11-21a "Git Along, Little Dogies" as transcribed by John Lomax

ex. 11-21b "Git Along, Little Dogies" as arranged by White and Shackley in *The Lonesome Cowboy*

The use of folklore is more pervasive in *Rodeo*, a simpler score, than in *Billy the Kid*, and for the most part the familiar tunes are allowed to appear in their entirety and (as Howard Pollock puts it) "in relatively traditional settings." For that very reason, the score's slow section, "Corral Nocturne" (Ex. 11-22), the one extended portion in which no folk tunes are known to be quoted, takes on an extra significance, since its style is completely consistent with the folklore-saturated sections of the ballet, showing to what an extent Copland had absorbed the folk idiom into his own increasingly distinctive and influential Americanist style.

The music is a veritable tour de force of simplicity and "accessibility," and to that extent could be said to keep faith with the Popular Front's call for a music that resisted the mannerisms and complications of elite modernism. Awareness of the extent to which Copland had formerly displayed those mannerisms makes his compliance with the call seem a knowing one. But to an extent unmatched by any of his contemporaries, Copland succeeded in maintaining both stylistic individuality and a high level of interesting technical detail (both of them prime modernist values) without compromising the "naturalness" and easy comprehensibility of his new style. In his hands, the new simplicity seemed an innovation.

ex. 11-21c "Git Along, Little Dogies" as harmonized by Oscar J. Fox

ex. 11-21d "Git Along, Little Dogies" as adapted by Aaron Copland in *Billy the Kid*

**ex. 11-22 Aaron Copland, *Rodeo*, "Corral nocturne" in the composer's
piano score, beginning**

The reasons for that freshness of effect are elusive (a longstanding critical riddle, in fact) but some of them
can perhaps be accounted for in terms of "voicing" (i.e., chord spacing) and orchestration, while others seem
to reflect a flair for the "neonationalist" assimilation of folklore at a very basic level of style (which, as we
recall, was Stravinsky's secret, too). The strictness with which C-major diatonicism is maintained is in itself a
bit shocking, given the time. Out of fifty-three measures, only sixteen have any sharps or flats; and when
accidentals are present they usually signal quick forays into new key areas that are maintained as strictly as
the original one. (Only twice, in mm. 14 and 52 at opposite ends of the piece, are there direct chromatic
inflections.)

It had surely been a long time since a piece of modern music had begun with six bars of nothing but Is, IVs,
and Vs. The first modification on the scheme consists of Stravinskyesque superimpositions (e.g., I over IV in
m. 7) that maintain diatonic purity while introducing some harmonic novelty and a whiff of counterpoint. At

2, when the music from mm. 3–6 is given a varied reprise, the "wide open" spacing recalls Harris's "heliotropic" manner, already typed as "American"; in combination with the primary-colors harmonization it became a Copland trademark. The most characteristic and convincing touch comes in m. 9 and at analogous points thereafter. The introduction at these points of "mixolydian" B♭s to neutralize the dominant chord recapitulates the tonal progression of "Git Along Little Dogies" (most clearly seen in John Lomax's transcription, Ex. 11-21a)— as telling an example of "neonationalism" as Stravinsky had ever milked from Russian folklore. The source tune is nowhere to be found, but its style has been absorbed as bedrock.

The two-part counterpoint at 4 (Ex. 11-23) also recalls Stravinsky's earlier achievement in the way it posits a strict diatonic style in which parallel fifths and even sevenths are made to sound "correct." That invented yet compelling neoprimitivist style reached its fullest development in Copland's third Americanist ballet, *Appalachian Spring* (1944), composed for the eminent "modern dance" choreographer Martha Graham, in which a set of variations on the Shaker hymn '"Tis the Gift to Be Simple" became something of an emblem for Copland's uncomplicated yet technically sophisticated manner. (It was widely played *in memoriam* after his death at the age of ninety.)

ex. 11-23 Aaron Copland, *Rodeo*, "Corral nocturne" in the composer's piano score, mm. 33–37

The most concentrated (and equally emblematic) assertion of Copland's neonationalism was *Fanfare for the Common Man* (Ex. 11-24), composed in 1942, the first year of World War II so far as America was concerned, as part of a series of nineteen orchestral fanfares commissioned by the English conductor Eugene Goossens (1893–1962), then heading the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, as concert-openers during the wartime seasons. Copland's, performed in March 1943, was the only contribution to the series—which included compositions by Hanson, Harris, Thomson, Piston, Cowell, Deems Taylor, Milhaud (then living as a refugee in California), and Daniel Gregory Mason—to survive the circumstances of its commission and join the repertory.

ex. 11-24 Aaron Copland, *Fanfare for the Common Man*, **mm. 1–21**

The theme, given out unharmonized at first by three trumpets in unison, and then with three horns in two-part counterpoint, takes the homespun "wide open" style to extremes. Absolutely diatonic and contoured in great soaring arches, it is projected in its solo statement over nearly two octaves, and in its duet form over nearly three. The trumpet part has only four instances of conjunct motion, the horn part none. Phrases typically end in wide descents through multiple skips. The counterpoint is entirely homorhythmic and proceeds entirely by similar motion. The closest the two parts ever get to one another is a perfect fourth. For the most part they sound sixths, tenths, fifths, and—just as "consonant" in its treatment—a seventh.

These are the traits—mined in equal measure from Western (or otherwise rural) folklore and from the wide intervals and angular contours of Copland's earlier modernistic style—that at last began to communicate a generic (or generalized) "America" to concert audiences both at home and abroad. Needless to say, they were quickly copied not only by other composers of concert music, but also by film and commercial composers in need of methods of instantaneous evocation. In this way they quickly became a stereotype, and "Coplandesque" became an adjective denoting a certain range of moods—pastoral, wistful, sanguine, domesticated—that in turn conjured up a comforting vision of home to depression-era and wartime America.

The most overtly patriotic use to which Copland put his "prairie" style was *A Lincoln Portrait*, yet another product of the banner year 1942. It was commissioned by the conductor André Kostelanetz, a specialist in summertime "pops" concerts, shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and was first performed in Cincinnati in May. It uses two very familiar songs: Stephen Foster's *Camptown Races* (1850) to lend period flavor to the quick middle section, and *On Springfield Mountain* (or, *The Pesky Sarpent*), from the Damon collection, a natural for evoking Lincoln both because Lincoln had made his political name in Springfield, Illinois, and because the text of the song laments the loss of a man cut down, as Lincoln was, in the prime of life.

After the middle section, the solemn opening returns, this time accompanied by a speaker reading quotations from Lincoln's speeches chosen for their bearing on the predicament of a nation thrust into a military conflict that would test its resolve and its democratic principles. Inevitably, the last of these extracts (Ex. 11-25) is the peroration of the most famous Lincoln speech of all, the Gettysburg Address, accompanied by a trumpet recalling *On Springfield Mountain*, the opening phrase of which coincides with one of the phrases of "Taps," the bugle call sounded at military funerals. When the speaker finishes, the orchestra provides a coda that develops the same multivalent phrase from the folk song into an epitome of "heliotropism."

"I've stolen your thunder,"[83] Copland joked to Earl Robinson, who had followed up on his *Abe Lincoln* of 1936 with a Lincoln cantata of his own, called *Lonesome Train*, in that same early wartime season of 1942. Like Copland's, Robinson's also contains parts for speaking voices (six of them, plus eight solo singers and chorus). But where Robinson's effort remained within the sectarian confines of "progressive" and labor circles, Copland's became a staple of the mainstream concert repertory. That does nothing to alter the fact that *A Lincoln Portrait* was as much a product of the Popular Front esthetic as *Lonesome Train*, even if (as Howard Pollock points out) Lincoln exerted an appeal for all Americans, "especially as a symbol of democracy in action" that "transcended partisan politics."[84]

ex. 11-25 Aaron Copland, *A Lincoln Portrait*, mm. 257–264

That, of course, was exactly the reason for his partisan exploitation. Lincoln was the radical left's passport to general acceptability; and this was even more the case after 1941, when the United States and Soviet Russia unexpectedly found themselves allied in a war against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. During the war, and for a short while thereafter, friendship toward the Soviet Union was official American policy (even as, between 1939 and 1941, friendship toward Nazi Germany was official Soviet policy). One of the fanfares Goossens commissioned for the Cincinnati Symphony, by Deems Taylor, was called "Fanfare for Russia," and it quoted "Dubinushka" ("The cudgel"), an old Russian revolutionary song that had been banned under the tsars.

Taylor was never associated with the political left, and his composing a Fanfare for Russia in wartime did not in itself make for such an association. In the case of Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*, however, those associations went deep: not only to the Lincoln music of Earl Robinson or the writings of Carl Sandburg (who was the first to record the speaker's part, with Kostelanetz, shortly after the premiere), but to the Soviet genre of oratorios with speaker, singled out in Elie Siegmeister's Popular Front tract for its capacity "to focus and

intensify a sense of solidarity among great masses of people."[85]

Indeed, according to the threefold definition to be given in chapter 13, Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* perfectly exemplified what in the Soviet Union was called "socialist realist" art. It had a pronounced national character, conveyed both through citations of actual folk and popular songs and by means of a personal style that drew heavily on an idealized folk idiom. It had a strong ideological component, conveyed both explicitly in words, and implicitly by virtue of its accessibility to a wide and heterogeneous audience, which it sought to unite behind an idea. And yes, it served the purposes of the Communist Party as then enunciated, which at that time of crisis were barely distinguishable from the aims of American society at large.

Those aims were later sharply differentiated, of course, and during the 1950s and beyond, to be identified as a Communist carried a ruinous stigma in the United States. The stigma was not unjustified in the case of the many Communist operatives who actively engaged in espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union; but it was also applied indiscriminately to members and sympathizers who were associated with the Party out of sincere idealism in the 1930s and 1940s, when radical politics was not considered to be at all incompatible with American patriotism. As we shall see, Copland was forced to disavow his earlier political affiliations, and claim that his Americanist style was a purely esthetic construct. His music was sufficiently popular, and he was sufficiently esteemed as a musician, for the claim to be accepted. But the connection between his widely emulated Americanist idiom and the Popular Front is a historical fact. Unless it is taken into account, the development of American music during the depression years cannot be adequately understood. There is no reason to assume that Anglo-American folklore would have achieved its emblematic status in American concert music under other circumstances.

As in the case of "jazz," the authenticity of Copland's folklore appropriations was challenged. Roy Harris, whose Americanist style had been a stimulant to Copland's, but who had kept proudly aloof from "quotational" methods, was stirred to compete with Copland after the success of *Billy the Kid* threatened his status as premier Americanist. (It is possible, too, that Harris was stimulated more directly by the Popular Front line; although he was never institutionally affiliated with radical politics, he was an enthusiast of Soviet music and dedicated his Fifth Symphony, first performed shortly after the German defeat at Stalingrad in February 1943, to "the heroic and freedom-loving people of our great Ally, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as a tribute to their strength in war, their staunch idealism for world peace, their ability to cope with stark materialistic problems of world order without losing a passionate belief in the fundamental importance of the arts.") Harris's Fourth Symphony, originally conceived as a "Folksong Jamboree" for nonprofessional chorus and orchestra (and retitled "Folksong Symphony" at his publisher's insistence after two purely instrumental movements were added to it) is a medley of famous American songs. Three movements are based on single songs, including, as finale, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again," a Civil War song on which Harris had already composed an overture on commission. The second movement, titled "Western Cowboy," is a tapestry woven of three songs from the Lomax collection, and the next-to-last, called "Negro Fantasy," conflates two well-known spirituals. Two of the cowboy songs in the second movement had already been used by Copland in *Billy the Kid*. The Symphony was first performed in April 1940, and in its revised and expanded form received another well-publicized premiere in December.

In between, Harris published a testy article called "Folksong—American Big Business," in which he made two big claims. First, that the integrity of American folklore was threatened by commercial exploitation; and second, that only those for whom folk songs were the stuff of daily life had any business incorporating them into artworks. In support of the first claim, Harris warned of "urban charlatans"[86] (as Beth Levy puts it): "America," Harris prophesied:

> will have many folksong vendors in the next few years. Some city boys may take a short motor trip
> through our land and return to write the Song of the Prairies—others will be folksong authorities after
> reading in a public library for a few weeks.[87]

"Song of the Prairies," *Saga of the Prairie*—it was clear who Harris was trying to impugn. In support of his second claim, he offered himself as evidence: the composer as great Westerner, the first of a breed who

will absorb and use the idioms of folk music as naturally as the folk who unconsciously generated them. They will have learned that folk song is a native well-spring, an unlimited source of fresh material; that it can't be reduced to a few formulas to stir and mix to taste. Those composers who are drawn to and richly satisfied with folksong will inherit the privilege of using it with the professional's resources and discipline and the amateur's enthusiasm and delight.[88]

To solidify the claim that he came to folk song as a birthright, rather than as a commodity to be exploited, Harris began the article with autobiographical ruminations, recalling how "Idaho Bill," a cowboy friend, complained to the composer about the professionalization of the rodeo at a Cowboy's Reunion they had attended together. "You know there's somethin cussed-ornery about that, somehow," said Idaho Bill.[89] "Taint decent to be ridin your heart out for pay." "Now that," the composer commented, "is what folksong is all about: singing and dancing your heart out for yourself and *the people you were born among*" (italics added).

But though a Westerner, the California-bred Harris was no cowboy; his attempt to construct a self-serving mystique of authenticity was as spurious as it was pernicious. And it did not work. It was precisely the novelty and the originality, rather than the literal authenticity, of Copland's folk-song treatments that gained them their acceptance as American emblem in the context of the concert hall; as always, the only authenticity that counts is perceived authenticity.

The decisive success that a left-leaning, homosexual Jew from Brooklyn, triply marginalized by birth and temperament from anyone's definition of an all-American hero, finally enjoyed in defining America musically is further testimony to what has already emerged many times over as a musical-historical truth: in art, the national is a socially negotiated discourse rather than a natural essence. Popular acceptance, as evidenced both by audience reaction and by professional emulation, is what determines the authenticity of musical nationalism; and popular acceptance is a complicated transaction into which many historical factors inevitably—and unpredictably—play.

Notes:

(82) Jessica Burr, "Arranging 'Git Along, Little Dogies': A Case Study Using Aaron Copland's Cowboy Songbooks," paper presented at the Sixty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Kansas City, Missouri, 4 November 1999.

(83) Robinson and Gordon, *Ballad of an American*, p. 65.

(84) Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, p. 358.

(85) Siegmeister, *Music and Society*, p. 59.

(86) Levy, "White Hope," p. 158.

(87) Roy Harris, "Folksong—American Big Business" (1940); *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, eds. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 163.

(88) *Ibid*., p. 164.

(89) *Ibid*., p. 161.

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CHAPTER 12 In Search of Utopia

Schoenberg, Webern, and Twelve-Tone Technique

Chapter: CHAPTER 12 In Search of Utopia
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
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PROGRESS VS. RESTORATION

On the evening of 23 February 1928, Arnold Schoenberg went to the opera. A new work by Stravinsky was having its local premiere, and attendance, so to speak, was mandatory. Stravinsky, at forty-five, had yet to make a name for himself as a composer of opera. Having made his reputation as a composer of ballets, he affected coolness toward music theater encumbered (as he maintained) with words. "Music can be united with action or with words," he once told a reporter, "but not with both without bigamy."[1]

To date he had written only a couple of one-acters. *The Nightingale*, based on a tale by Hans Christian Andersen, had had its Paris premiere in 1914 during Diaghilev's last prewar season. As befitted its performance by a ballet troupe, it was more a pageant than a conventional opera, very long on stage spectacle and very short on sung content. *Mavra*, a trifling "opéra bouffe" based on a funny little story in verse by the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, performed (again in Paris and again by Diaghilev) in 1922, was Stravinsky's first downright flop. The scuttlebutt was that the great Russian composer, who ironically enough was the son of a star opera singer, just wasn't cut out for opera (or "lacked melodic invention").

fig. 12-1 Stravinsky, by Picasso, 1925.

But the new work, *Oedipus Rex*, had had a big success when first performed in Paris in 1927, and came to Berlin preceded by a formidable reputation. Like the other Stravinsky operas it was a terse one-act affair, and like the others it was extremely unconventional in its dramatic methods. But otherwise it was very different from them, in ways that were expressly calculated by the composer to be seen as a sign of the times. Having decided not to go back to Russia after the Bolshevik coup d'état, Stravinsky had renounced the Russian language as a medium for his music. Instead—and very much in keeping with the postwar "neoclassical" idea—he composed the opera on a "universal" myth (for such was the prestige enjoyed by the culture of ancient Greece, the original "classical" culture), and in Latin, a "universal" and "classical" language. He probably chose Latin over the original Greek because, unlike Greek, it signified religious ritual to modern Western Europeans, especially the Roman Catholics among them, and this further emphasized notions of universality and authority.

The fact that the language was unintelligible to modern audiences anywhere in the world did not worry

Stravinsky. He solved the problem, at least to his own satisfaction, by having the librettist—the ubiquitous Jean Cocteau, whose text had been translated into Latin by a scholarly priest (later a cardinal) named Jean Daniélou—furnish a little précis of the action that could be announced to the audience in advance of each scene by "Le Speaker" (as the part was identified in the score), in the language of the country where the opera was performed. There could hardly be any greater "distancing" of a drama than that. But as Stravinsky's strange methods of course assumed, myths were well-known stories; nobody, he could reasonably suppose, would go to see an *Oedipus* opera for the plot. In that sense attending a mythological opera really was, or could be, like attending a religious service. It provided an occasion for an audience to come together in worship: not of God, precisely, in this case, but of an artifact of "universal" culture that bore a "universal" message.

But what *was* that message? By the time Stravinsky wrote his opera, the myth of Oedipus, the tale of a ruler who unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother, was well on its way to being appropriated and transformed by Sigmund Freud and his followers in psychoanalysis into an allegory of family relationships and the guilt anxieties they produce in modern men. For the Greeks, especially as embodied in the famous tragedy by Sophocles, it was an allegory of fate, which took revenge on the great and powerful king by revealing to him the horrible and unacceptable circumstances of his ascent to the throne: a "classic" case of skeletons in the closet and a chilling reminder that good fortune is precarious and provisional. Because he must acknowledge crimes he has unwittingly committed, the lofty Oedipus is cast down; Sophocles's chillingly memorable last line, spoken (or sung) by the moralizing "Greek chorus," exhorts the audience to "count no mortal happy till he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain."[2]

For Stravinsky, the play was less a "family romance" or a parable of fate than an allegory of insubordination and submission—precisely the haughty lesson we have seen him impose on musical performers in his Harvard lectures, applied now on a "universal" scale. Not fate but Oedipus's pride brings him down, for it causes him to tempt fate and pursue dangerous knowledge. At the beginning of the opera his musical utterances are placed high and are richly and ostentatiously ornate. At the end his voice is brought low and his lines are stark.

But that is not all. To symbolize and ratify the offended universal order, Stravinsky resurrected in glory every stiff traditional convention of the eighteenth-century musical stage (da capo arias, monolithic choruses, accompanied recitatives) and every seemingly outmoded harmonic cliché (arpeggiated triads, diminished seventh chords, formulaic cadences). It was (to put it Greekly) as if Apollo himself, the god of formal beauty and repose in whose honor Stravinsky had recently composed a ballet, were beating back the "Wagnerian revolution" (here standing in for revolution in general) with its vaunting individualistic hubris and its frenzied overthrow of conventions as if in the name of Dionysus, the god of wine and orgies, for the sake of untrammeled emotional arousal and expression.

In the Harvard lectures, Stravinsky connected the theme of his *Oedipus* with the objectives of his musical neoclassicism. He invited his audience to receive his words as "dogmatic" and "objective" confidences, delivered "under the stern auspices of order and discipline,"[3] virtues that are finally associated, in the fourth lecture, with their "best example" in music, a Bach fugue: "A pure form in which the music means nothing outside of itself. Doesn't the fugue imply the composer's submission to the rules? And is it not within those strictures that he finds the full flowering of his freedom as a creator?"[4] The artist must "submit to the law," to ordained values that transcend individuals, because, Stravinsky finally said explicitly, "Apollo demands it."[5]

Needless to say, Stravinsky's *Oedipus* made Schoenberg ill. He vented his rage at it, and at Stravinsky, in his diary the next day. "This work is nothing," he noted in exasperation; and yet he also noted, with impressive candor, that he feared it, for "the works which in every way arouse one's dislike are precisely those the next generation will in every way like."[6] The *Oedipus* premiere came at the end of a period that Schoenberg later remembered as the worst in his life as an artist, "the first time in my career," as he put it, "that I lost, for a short time, my influence on youth."[7] The reason? A French journalist summed it up: "Schoenberg is a romantic; our young composers are classic."[8] That sense of vulnerability conditioned Schoenberg's furious rejection of neoclassicism.

By 1928, Schoenberg's polemics against Stravinsky were nothing new; and the mutual antagonism of the two composers' followers were approaching proportions that became legendary in the annals of twentieth-century music. Two years earlier, Schoenberg had fired off a little squib called "Igor Stravinsky: Der Restaurateur,"[9] the punning title of which compared Stravinsky, who claimed to be restoring timeless musical values, to somebody who ran a restaurant (and merely catered, that meant, to trivial "culinary" taste).

Stravinsky, for his part, liked to poke fun at those (beginning, he supposed, with Wagner) who claimed to be writing the music of the future. Stravinsky claimed, instead, to be writing the true music of the present. He went around telling interviewers, tongue in cheek, that "modernists have ruined modern music." One reporter, in New York in January 1925, asked him who he had in mind:

> Stravinsky smiled. "I shan't mention any names," said he. "But they are the gentlemen who work with formulas instead of ideas. They have done that so much they have badly compromised that word 'modern.' I don't like it. They started out by trying to write so as to shock the bourgeoisie and finished up by pleasing the Bolsheviks. I am not interested in either the bourgeoisie or the Bolsheviks."[10]

It is not entirely obvious that Stravinsky had Schoenberg (certainly no Bolshevik, though often touted as a revolutionary) in mind, but Schoenberg had no doubt about it. Who else could Stravinsky have meant, Schoenberg thought, but he, the extreme maximalizer of Romantic individualism in music, the composer who brought the art of psychopathology to its final shriek in *Erwartung*? It is reasonable to believe that Schoenberg was at least among Stravinsky's targets, because (as he put it elsewhere) "atonality" implied "anarchy,"[11] a state of lawlessness against which Stravinsky wanted to dictate the Bachian reaction. It must have seemed to an uprooted Russian aristocrat an analogue to the "Bolshevik" straits in which his native land was foundering.

But if Stravinsky was writing the music of the present (and Schoenberg was by implication a thing of the past), then why, Schoenberg wanted to know, did Stravinsky look to the even more distant past for models? That was the nub of the issue as far as Schoenberg was concerned: Stravinsky was trying to turn back the clock on the development of music, substituting restoration for the progress it was every artist's obligation to advance. It was not just an esthetic but a moral issue, involving not just taste but the artist's responsibility. After reading Stravinsky's New York interviews, Schoenberg retorted not only in word but in musical deed. In November and December of 1925 he composed (to his own texts) a set of Three Satires, opus 28, for chorus, of which the first two were unaccompanied canons and the last a little cantata called *Der neue Klassizismus* ("The new classicism").

In the cantata Schoenberg, like Stravinsky, named no names, but spoofed those who say (with the tenor at the outset), "No longer will I stay Romantic. I hate Romantic! From tomorrow on I am writing only the purest Classical!" or who aver, with the chorus at the end, "Classical perfection — that's the latest style!" But in the text of the second canon (a clever piece called *Vielseitigkeit* ("Versatility") that can be turned upside down and performed with the same results as rightside up) he could not resist a direct hit:

Ja, wer trommelt denn da?	But who's that drumming away there?
Das ist ja der kleine Modernsky!	Why, it's little Modernsky!
Hat sich ein Bubizopf schneiden	He's had his hair cut in an
lassen;	old-fashioned queue,
sieht ganz gut aus!	And it looks quite nice!
Wie echt falsches Haar!	Like real false hair!

Wie eine Perücke!	**Like a peruke [pigtail wig]!**
Ganz (wie sich ihn der kleine	**Just like (or so little Mo-**
Modernsky vorstellt),	**dernsky likes to think)**
ganz der Papa Bach!	**Just like Papa Bach!**

By 1928, then, the lines seemed pretty well drawn between those who were still committed to perpetual progress in art and those who wanted to make new contact with old wellsprings.

Notes:

(1) *The Daily Mail* (London), 13 February 1913; Eric Walter White, "Stravinsky in Interview," *Tempo*, no. 97 (1971): 7.

(2) *Oedipus the King*, trans. David Grene; Sophocles, *Three Tragedies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 76.

(3) Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), pp. 5–8.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 79.

(5) *Ibid.*, p. 83.

(6) Arnold Schoenberg, "Stravinsky's *Oedipus*" (1928); *Style and Idea*, p. 483.

(7) Schoenberg, "How One Becomes Lonely" (1937); *Style and Idea*, p. 52.

(8) Paul Landormy, "Schönberg, Bartók, und die französische Musik," *Musikblätter des Anbruch*, May 1922; quoted in Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music from the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 126.

(9) *Style and Idea*, pp. 48 1–82.

(10) Henrietta Malkiel, "Modernists Have Ruined Modern Music, Stravinsky Says," *Musical America*, 10 January 1925, p. 9.

(11) See Arthur Lourié, *Sergei Koussevitzky and His Epoch* (New York: Knopf, 1931), p. 196.

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Arnold Schoenberg

Erwartung

DISCOVERY OR INVENTION?

Chapter: CHAPTER 12 In Search of Utopia
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

But only in rhetoric. For the amazing and ironic fact is that, despite their mutual disdain and their bombastically expressed differences, Schoenberg and "little Modernsky" were in the 1920s caught up as participants in the same postwar reaction; and Schoenberg's technical breakthrough of those years, the main subject of this chapter and for a long time the very emblem of musical progress, was as much a neoclassicizing or restorative effort as anything done in the name of Papa Bach.

No composer suffered a graver creative crisis in the years surrounding the Great War than Schoenberg. The war itself oddly, was not (at least consciously) a trauma for him. He enlisted enthusiastically in the Austrian army as a private despite his relatively advanced years (he was forty) and his fame in civilian life. He claimed to have enjoyed the anonymity, or at least the respite from notoriety, that the army gave him. "The war years were my peace years," he later quipped. But maybe he also found relief in the time-consuming, mentally undemanding routines of army life from his creative problems.

For a period of a decade or more, Schoenberg composed only fitfully when not entirely blocked. In November 1913 he completed a one-act opera, *Die glückliche Hand* ("The lucky hand"), op. 18, sometimes translated "The Golden Touch," on which he had been working since 1910. Between November 1914 and July 1916 he managed to complete three little orchestral songs to join a previously composed one in a set of four, published as opus 22. Opus 23, a set of five pieces for piano, was not even begun until July 1920 and not finished until February 1923. For four years, this means, Schoenberg did not complete a single composition, although he started many. When opus 23 was published in 1923, it was the first new composition by Schoenberg to appear since 1914. The long silence signaled an impasse.

Such a turn in any famous artist's career (and especially an expressionist's!) calls forth all kinds of biographical speculation. Doubtless psychological factors played a significant role, but there were also musical issues to be solved— or at least Schoenberg deeply felt that there were. If one compares *Die glückliche Hand*, the opera that arduously preoccupied him between 1910 and 1913, with *Erwartung*, the opera that he had written with seeming effortlessness and at white heat in the late summer of 1909, one can see (at least in suitably bespectacled hindsight) the makings of the crisis.

The glory *of Erwartung* had been its imaginative abandon: Schoenberg "trusted his hand,"[12] as he later put it, to compose an "athematic" and "atonal" music that not even his own rational mind could comprehend at the time. In chapter 6 we saw that its touted avoidance of motivic and thematic repetition was not perfect, and that there were aspects of the score (particularly its harmony) that could be rationalized in retrospect; but the basic effort to avoid the appearance of rationalized routine and yet achieve a coherently expressive result was impressively successful. The music of *Die glückliche Hand*, while still atonal and in principle athematic (as any genuinely expressionistic music ought by rights to be), far more frequently resorted to rationalized (and therefore analytically transparent) procedure. There are extensive passages in imitative counterpoint. There is a lot of ostinato. One might say that the devices that resurfaced in *Pierrot lunaire* under cover of irony persisted in the new opera without the ironic pretext, and were therefore problematical.

The difference between the two operas is sometimes explained as a difference in gender portrayal

Erwartung, the portrait of a feminine psyche under stress, conformed to the misogynistic ideas of contemporary Viennese psychologists and sexologists like Otto Weininger, whose widely read *Geschlecht und Charakter* ("Sex and character," 1903) defined women as "logically insane," and attributed their often admired "intuition" to "a lack of definiteness in their thinking capacity," which "gives the widest scope to vague associations."[13] These descriptive slogans are easy to apply by analogy to the music of *Erwartung*: "tingling and spasmodic, sensual, without structure or direction,"[14] in the words of critic and composer David Schiff. The obvious organizing factors in the music of *Die glückliche Hand,* which concerns a masculine paragon (pretty obviously the composer's own ego-surrogate) threatened by feminine guile, could then be seen as devices for portraying the superior mental and ethical equipage of the male.

Schoenberg knew Weininger's crackpot writings and admired them. He even cited Weininger in the preface to his *Harmonielehre* as an example to his pupils and readers of "one who has thought earnestly."[15] Schoenberg's creative crisis, in both its musical and personal (ethical, spiritual) dimensions may have had something to do with the composer's need to lessen his reliance on "intuition," stigmatized by Weininger as feminine (as well as Jewish, another category applicable to the recently converted and therefore squeamish Schoenberg). What had seemed a creative ideal and a glorious liberation had become something he now felt a need to exorcise.

Notes:

(12) Egon Wellesz, *Arnold Schoenberg: The Formative Years* (London: Galliard, 1971), p. xii.

(13) Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 379.

(14) David Schiff, "Schoenberg's Cool Eye for the Erotic," *New York Times*, Arts and Leisure, 8 August 1999, p. 30.

(15) Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, p. 2.

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Josef Matthias Hauer

NOMOS (THE LAW)

Chapter: CHAPTER 12 In Search of Utopia
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Whatever its source, Schoenberg did express discomfort with what music historian Joseph Auner has called the "intuitive aesthetic"[16] that produced *Erwartung*. His creative trough was a response to this dilemma. Outwardly Schoenberg cast the dilemma as one involving the autonomy of music rather than the spiritual health of the composer. Composing *Erwartung*—that is, a thirty-minute stretch of athematic atonal music — would have been impossible without a text to hang it on. Could a way be found to compose such music without an extramusical crutch?

Die glückliche Hand was a first tentative step in dealing with the problem of musical autonomy, but ultimately unsatisfactory: first, of course, because as in any opera there was still a text to lean on; but also because the traditional contrapuntal textures and the ostinatos could only be understood as a retreat from a problematical extreme rather than progress toward a new ideal. Schoenberg did not come out of the ditch, so to speak, until he had found a means of rationalizing his technique that did not depend on the kind of outworn traditional methods that satisfied the likes of Stravinsky. These new means were first displayed in the piano pieces he began composing around 1920. They provided a new "principle capable of serving as a rule,"[17] in the words of the architect Le Corbusier (1887–1965), whose quest was retrospectively compared with Schoenberg's by the British music critic Donald Mitchell, in an influential discussion published in 1963.

The sources of Schoenberg's new technique have been variously described and furiously disputed. One of his pupils, the composer and musicologist Egon Wellesz (1885–1974), claimed some credit for stimulating its discovery.[18] In 1916, Wellesz wrote, he met Josef Matthias Hauer (1883–1959), a composer who had just received a medical discharge from the army and was working as an elementary school teacher. Hauer showed Wellesz some short keyboard compositions dating back to around 1912 — technical studies, really — in which he was experimenting with a novel technique that Hauer chose to call *Nomos*, after the ancient Greek word for "law." A *Nomos* consisted of a particular ordering of the twelve tones of the chromatic scale that served as the basis for a particular composition. In Hauer's pieces, each such melodic sequence was divided into four groups of three notes each, which furnished a harmonic vocabulary for the composition in question.

Wellesz showed these little studies by Hauer to his fellow students, and eventually to his teacher. By then Schoenberg had experimented (as we already know) with "aggregate compositions" that would display and exploit the total chromatic spectrum in various ways, and he was by no means the only composer to have done so. (See the discussions of Scriabin and Ives, as well as Schoenberg, in chapters 4–6.) Along with Webern, Schoenberg had already written some tiny pieces in which the completion of the aggregate marked important formal divisions or even defined the work's limits (chapter 6). Nor were Hauer's *Nomos* studies absolutely the first pieces to be based consistently on particular orderings of the twelve pitch classes. Gregory Dubinsky, a scholar who has researched the origins of the technique, has proposed some earlier candidates, including works by two Russians: Nikolai Obouhov, whom we met in chapter 4, and Yefim Golyscheff (1897–1970).[19] But in Wellesz's recollection, Hauer's had a decisive effect on Schoenberg: they "showed him the way out of his crisis; they came to him as the right impulse at the right moment."[20] Wellesz's account is not only overly simple but also vague and factually inexact. Still, its basic contention probably holds water.

A brief look at Hauer's *Nomos*, op. 19 (composed not in 1912 but 1919) will confirm several points of interest. The first page, given in Ex. 12-1, displays an exhaustive sequence of twelve pitch-classes (B♭ E♭ F D♭ G E A C F♯ D B A♭) that is repeated five times. It is parsed not into groups of three or four notes, which divide the twelve pitches evenly, but into rhythmically identical groups of five, which overlap the pitch series rather in the manner of a medieval isorhythmic tenor, so that no two melodic phrases have identical pitch content. The main innovation is the constant circulation of the exhaustive chromatic series so that no pitch class ever recurs until the other eleven have intervened.

The strictness of this procedure in Hauer's op. 19 is not maintained past the first page. But now compare a work of Schoenberg's composed in February 1923: "Walzer" (waltz), published as the last piece in op. 23, the set of five that marked Schoenberg's return to productivity (Ex. 12-2). The note sequence played by the right hand in mm. 1–4, which exhausts the chromatic aggregate, is quite rigorously maintained as a sort of ostinato from beginning to end. Since the pitch-classes always follow one another in the same order, it will be convenient to number them for ready reference in the discussion that follows:

1   C♯(D♭)

2   A

3   B

4   G

5   A♭(G♯)

6   F♯(G♭)

7   A♯(B♭)

8   D

9   E

10 E♭(D♯)

11 C

12 F

ex. 12-1 Josef Matthias Hauer, *Nomos*, Op. 19, beginning

Except for the curious way the left-hand part begins with a chord consisting of notes 6–8 (and then continues to the end of the series), the relationship of the little scheme just given and the music of the waltz is practically self-evident. (And even the little anomaly at the outset will find an explanation before we are done.) The left-hand D♭ in m. 2 is the beginning of a new statement of the series that continues in the left hand until E in m. 5 (note no. 9), whereupon it is taken up and completed by the right hand, beginning with the E♭ at the end of the same measure.

From this point on, the circulation of the pitch sequence is entirely straightforward, with both hands participating in each statement. Although a tedious exercise, numbering all the pitches in the composition according to our makeshift analytical scheme enables one to retrace all of Schoenberg's compositional decisions in a fashion rarely so accessible to analysis. Following through in this way will reveal the resourcefulness and variety of Schoenberg s treatment of the series. It is not a melody, although it gives rise to all the melodies; nor is it a harmony, although it gives rise to all the harmonies as well.

ex. 12-2 Arnold Schoenberg, Op. 23, no. 5 (Walzer), mm. 1–60

Various manners of dividing it up produce many kinds of texture from homophonic (melody + accompaniment) to homorhythmic (chordal) to intricately contrapuntal. The unaccompanied statement in the right hand, beginning toward the end of m. 17, is the most purely melodic (that is, monophonic) incarnation the series is given, reminiscent of Hauer's portentous octaves *all'unisono*; but note that Schoenberg's does not exhaust the series, and that the left hand's "harmonizing" entrance in m. 19 (on notes 11 and 12) both completes the statement begun by the right hand in m. 17 and dovetails into the next statement without any articulation of an ending. Thus we learn that in this piece the series is not in itself any kind of formal marker, and that it would be naive therefore to call the composition a theme and variations (although everything that happens in it, being derived from a common source, could be called "developing variation").

One spot invites special comment. The passage from m. 44 to m. 55, in what an eighteenth-century keyboard player would have called the "broken" (or arpeggiated) style, presents three statements of the series in which each measure introduces three notes, so that four measures exhaust the series. Because of that evenness of

distribution, the pitches presented in m. 44 are the same as those presented in mm. 48 and 52; m. 45 corresponds to mm. 49 and 53; and so on, only the registers being varied to maintain a sense of continual evolution (or "developing variation").

The series, in other words, has been divided into four recurrent "trichords," or three-note groups, just as Wellesz had (erroneously) described Hauer's procedure in his *Nomos* pieces. Schoenberg's passage, in fact, conforms more closely to Wellesz's description of Hauer's pieces than any composition by Hauer. Evidently, Schoenberg's waltz had replaced Hauer's actual *Nomos* in Wellesz's memory. This may lessen the reliability of Wellesz's factual details, but it actually strengthens the plausibility of the general connection Wellesz drew between the two composers' explorations.

The only place in the waltz where Schoenberg departs from strict adherence to the order presented at the outset comes at the very end (Ex. 12-3), when the left hand suddenly puts the series in reverse, starting with note 12 (F) and running back to note 1 (C♯ in m. 106). That C♯ is paired in a "dyad" or two-note harmony with A (note 2). The fact that a dyad presents two pitches as a single simultaneous attack enables Schoenberg to create an elaborate musical pun, starting a series in forward motion with the same dyad. That series continues in m. 106 in the right hand, and is pitted contrapuntally against another reversed series that begins in the left hand in m. 107. The B♭D dyad on the downbeat of m. 108 again does double duty, participating both in the right hand's forward series and the left hand's backward one. Because both series are in continuous motion around the common dyad, measures 107–108 display a pitch palindrome. Putting the music, as it were, in reverse, letting it run backward (or "run down") shortly after the formal recapitulation of the opening melodic idea in m. 100, punningly reinforces the expectation of the end.

And the "anomalous" beginning? It is explained by the ending. The last three statements of the series, beginning with the C♯ and A tied over into m. 111, are increasingly chordal for "cadential" effect. The big eight-note chord in m. 112 contains notes 9–12 of a finishing statement and notes 1–4 of the next one. It is surrounded on either side by notes 5–8. The five-note chord on the downbeat of the last measure is the beginning of the last statement of the series. The F♯D dyad that ends the piece leaves the series hanging on notes 6 and 7. Now look back at the beginning of the piece and see how the left hand picks up those very notes and continues the series to the end. Perhaps in keeping with the use of the reversed series in mm. 104–111, the end of the piece is linked to the beginning as if the composition described a kind of circle in time.

ex. 12-3 Arnold Schoenberg, Op. 23, no. 5 (*Walzer*), mm. 104–end

It is possible that these "bending time" effects (or rather, the idea of such effects) harked back to the mystical thinking that had guided Schoenberg's prewar strivings toward the infinite and universal — hence toward the aggregate. Perhaps more likely, by 1923, it was a typically "Ortegan" jest to delight the minds of analysts, and therefore indicative of the "poietic" bias (the emphasis on the "making" of the composition rather than on its "effect") that increasingly characterized advanced composing-practice after the Great War. And it was precisely in its highly sophisticated, concentrated, and elaborated *making* that Schoenberg's music so thoroughly transcended whatever technical example Hauer's naive *Nomos* pieces had set for him.

Hauer, whose career amounted to so much less than Schoenberg's, became embittered over what he regarded (or at least advertised) as Schoenberg's intellectual theft. Schoenberg's followers and biographers, in retaliation, have tended to minimize or dismiss (and even deride) Hauer's putative input. It is not so difficult, at our present historical remove, to take a nonpartisan view, acknowledging that Hauer probably gave Schoenberg an important idea, but that Schoenberg, who did far more with that idea than its originator, lent it a prestige (hence an influence and historical importance) that Hauer's own efforts could not have accomplished.

The notorious *Prioritätstreit* ("battle over priority"), as Schoenberg's future biographer Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt was calling it as early as 1925, can only strike us now as a tempest in a teapot.[21] But at the time it mattered greatly, to Schoenberg as much as to Hauer. Indeed, Schoenberg recalled in a memoir that "when I gathered about twenty of my pupils together to explain to them the new method in 1923, I did it because I was afraid to be taken as an imitator of Hauer."[22] Precisely because the matter of priority was taken so seriously at the time, not only by the parties involved but also by onlookers, it can serve us now as a symptom of the "rush to the patent office" that was such an integral component of modernism — especially the German brand that descended from the ideology (and the rhetoric) of the mid-nineteenth-century New German School.

Notes:

(16) See Joseph Auner, "Schoenberg's Aesthetic Transformations and the Evolution of Form in 'Die gluckliche Hand.' " *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* XII (1989): 103–28.

(17) Donald Mitchell, *The Language of Modern Music* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), chap. 1.

(18) Wellesz, *Arnold Schoenberg: The Formative Years*, pp. xiii–xiv.

(19) Gregory Dubinsky, "Six Essays on the Dissemination of Twelve-Tone Composition, 1921–1945" (Ph.D. diss. in progress, University of California at Berkeley).

(20) Wellesz, *Arnold Schoenberg: The Formative Years*, p. xiv.

(21) H. H. Stuckenschmidt, "Zwölftöne-Musik," *Melos*, Vol. IV (1925), p. 520; cited in Dubinsky, *Six Essays*, Chap. 1.

(22) Schoenberg, "Schoenberg's Tone-Rows" (1936), *Style and Idea*, p. 213.

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Arnold Schoenberg

Twelve-note composition

Serialism

GIVING MUSIC AN AXIOMATIC BASIS

Chapter: CHAPTER 12 In Search of Utopia
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The strictness of Schoenberg's adherence to the ordered twelve-note series in his compositional practice, and the consequent pervasiveness with which the series informed the musical substance thus created, elevated the series in Schoenberg's usage to the status of a *Grundgestalt*, the "basic shape" or intervallic constellation that informs an entire composition down to its smallest details and gives it its "organic" motivic consistency. Indeed, the use of an exhaustive twelve-note series makes the *Grundgestalt* function, and the organic unity thus guaranteed, virtually automatic. And that, of course, was the great breakthrough, the "principle capable of serving as a rule," which allowed the composition of large-scale, abstract, and autonomous atonal music of constant and at-all-times-demonstrable motivic coherence despite its renunciation of predefined tonal hierarchies, and despite its frequent "athematicism."

But beware! As soon as any musical characteristic becomes the automatic result of a method, it stops being a compositional achievement. As long as Schoenberg's atonal music was based on "working with the tones of a motive," meaning an unordered collection of intervals, the kind of tightly controlled motivic organization visible (to cite one especially rich instance) at the beginning of the first piece in op. 23, composed in July 1920, is an impressive compositional tour de force (Ex. 12-4).

ex. 12-4 Arnold Schoenberg, Op. 23, no. 1 (*Sehr langsam*), mm. 1–5

The strict three-part contrapuntal texture is supersaturated with versions of the intervallic *Grundgestalt* (or basic cell, to use an "organicist" metaphor) first expressed as the opening harmony (F♯ A♭ A), which contains a major second, a minor second, and a minor third. The first three notes in the middle voice (A♭ G B♭) are a "linearization" of the same cell, immediately echoed by the top voice in m. 2 (E♭ D F). Meanwhile, the first three notes in the bottom voice (A C B) present a variant of the same linearization, in which the same intervals occur in the opposite order and with the contour reversed (a "retrograde inversion"). The bass B in the second measure is a pivot linking two sequential statements of this manner of presenting the basic cell. In m. 3 the middle voice repeats the three-note beginning of the bass in diminution at the octave, while in mm. 4–5, the bass reciprocates with a transposition of the middle voice's opening cell (B♭ A C), with the final interval inverted from a rising minor third to a falling major sixth.

(Note, incidentally, the "hairpins" in m. 5 over a single note, A. They are obviously impossible to perform on the piano, as Schoenberg surely knew perfectly well. The expressive swell on a single note, typical of vocal and string music, is part of the "idea" of the piece, rather than its sound — and so, it might be argued, is the motivic consistency we are now accounting for, which is far more likely to reveal itself fully to the analytical eye than to the listening ear. Again we see the composer characteristically preoccupied with "poietics" over "esthesics," with input over output, manufacture over effect.)

Meanwhile, another variant of the basic cell, in which the minor third and the minor second go in the same direction, covering a major third's total distance, has been enjoying a similar "developing variation." The first three notes in the top voice (F♯ E♭ D) are its first presentation, echoed in the middle voice in m. 3 (C B G♯). It, too, gets a "harmonic" presentation, on the downbeat of m. 4. But even before the middle voice has echoed it, the top voice reverses it (D♯ E G in mm. 2–3), and that reversal is also echoed in the middle voice (G♯ A C in m. 4). Both the initial statement of this variant in the top voice and its echo in the middle voice overlap with presentations of the variant previously described. Thus the first four notes of the "soprano" (F♯ Eb D F) and the four sixteenth notes in the "tenor" in m. 3 (A C B G♯) each present the two variants of the basic cell (but in opposite order) with the middle pair of notes doing double duty.

The head swims, not only at the thought of such motivic density (which the foregoing description has by no means fully accounted for) but also at the thought of the mental labor it must have required to contrive it. One can easily sympathize with the wish to find the kind of labor-saving device Schoenberg adopted in the final waltz from the same set of pieces, even if the lessened labor can seem to lessen the intellectual accomplishment. In any case, from 1921 on, virtually every one of Schoenberg's atonal compositions would adopt a chromatically exhaustive twelve-note series like the one in the waltz (or in Hauer's 1919 *Nomos*) as its basis.

Schoenberg called such a series a *Tonreihe*, using a German word for series, *Reihe*, that has "row" as its English cognate; hence the term "tone row" has become standard in British and American usage. At first he called the method on which he now relied *Reihenkomposition*, "composition with rows" or "serial composition." English usage in this case has favored Hauer's term *Zwölftontechnik*, "twelve-tone technique." (More pretentious writers sometimes call it "dodecaphony" from the Greek for twelve.) Eventually Schoenberg also came round to using this nomenclature, calling his method "composition with twelve tones related only to one another" (rather than to a predefined tonic).

And yet the term "twelve-tone", although we are certainly stuck with it, remains something of a misnomer; for what gives a tone row its distinction is not its pitch content (for every tone row has that in common with every other tone row) but its ordered interval content. That is what enables a row, like any basic cell or *Grundgestalt*, to maintain its identity when transposed. Indeed, it was transposition, as an outgrowth of his earlier *Grundgestalt* or "developing variation" technique, that now became Schoenberg's primary technical preoccupation: more specifically, the question of how transpositions (and precisely which transpositions) may help realize the form-defining or harmony-defining properties of particular tone rows. That is where Schoenberg will henceforth engineer his tours de force of compositional planning and motivic saturation.

The first major work of Schoenberg's that was written using twelve-tone row technique throughout was a five-movement Suite for Piano, published as opus 25 in 1925. The pieces in it—Präludium, Gavotte and Musette, Intermezzo, Menuett, Gigue—had accumulated over an eighteen-month period between July 1921 and March 1923, during which Schoenberg was also working on other compositions, but all were based on a single twelve-tone row, albeit treated with a bit more variety than Schoenberg had allowed in the waltz, the first twelve-tone piece to be published.

There, as we recall, Schoenberg had contented himself (partly as a technical challenge, partly in an effort to outdo Hauer) with a single "row form" until the end, when he ran it backwards a couple of times. The row was never even transposed, so that in this case it was indeed literally a row of tones as well as intervals. The technical challenge, of course, was to disguise the fact that the piece consisted of what in less sophisticated hands might have sounded like a relentless melodic ostinato. The suite was based on a complex consisting of a row, its inversion, and the transposition of each by a tritone (Ex. 12-5). Inverting a row, like inverting any

motive or Grundgestalt, maintains the same intervallic sequence as if seen in a mirror. Transposition, of course, has no effect at all on intervallic sequence. So the four rows in Ex. 12-5 are merely four ways of representing a single intervallic succession (i.e., a single *Grundgestalt*).

ex. 12-5 Row complex from Arnold Schoenberg, Suite, Op. 25

NB: In analyzing twelve-tone compositions, row transpositions are often counted by semitones. Thus the four row forms in Ex. 12-5 are labeled P (for "prime," the form heard first), I ("inversion"), P_6 (prime transposed up six semitones) and I_6 (inversion transposed up six semitones). For extra clarity, untransposed row forms are usually designated as having been transposed by "zero" semitones, thus: P_0 and I_0. In the diagram, the arrows running right to left are a reminder that rows can be freely reversed for additional variety within the same interval-determined unity.

Even before looking at or listening to the music, the row complex gives us a foretaste of its harmonic world. The row has been deliberately constructed so as to create close relationships between exactly these four forms, so as to produce an even more pervasive unity than a single row form could achieve. In other words, the row has been constructed with its role as a *Grundgestalt* in mind, and the character of the composition will be to a significant degree determined by the relationships that have been built into the structure of the row. And what are these relationships? By now they will seem very familiar, having appeared in the work of so many of the "maximalist" composers of the early twentieth century, including Schoenberg himself along with Stravinsky, Bartók, Webern, and Berg. But here they have been sublimated or abstracted into a formal and methodical context that accords with the cool ironic mood of postwar modernism.

It will take no more than a glance at the beginnings and ends of all the row forms in Ex. 12-5 to establish harmonic symmetry based on the "invariance" properties of the tritone as the principle Schoenberg's rows have been designed to exploit. The first and last notes in the untransposed prime form of the row are a tritone apart. Since the tritone reproduces itself when inverted, and since the only transposition invoked in Ex. 12-5 is that of the tritone itself, E and B♭ are the invariant framing pitches of every row form employed in the Suite. That is already a giant step toward defining a consistent (if contextual) "tonality" for the piece.

But there is more. Since any tritone can be embedded in a circle of minor thirds that shares its invariance properties (reproducing itself when inverted or when transposed by its generating interval), the notes G and D♭ will have the same invariance properties within this row complex as do the notes E and B♭. And that is the reason why Schoenberg made sure that those two notes would occupy adjacent positions in the untransposed prime form. They occupy order positions 3 and 4 in every form shown in Ex. 12-5, and hence will also function as an invariant pair within the actual music of the Suite. (When reversed forms of the row are employed, of course, the G and D♭ will just as invariably occupy positions 9 and 10.) In addition, the first pair of notes in each row form in Ex. 12-5 has a counterpart in one of the reversed forms: EF begins both P_0 and

RI_6; $EE\flat$, I_0 and R_6; $B\flat B$, P_6 and RI_0; $B\flat A$, I_6 and R_0. And ending pairs coincide similarly, as they must. These, too, are invariance relationships, the invariant pairs linking not only forward and backward row forms, but also transposed and untransposed ones.

By seeking out abstract invariance relationships like these within the row forms, it is easy to create concrete musical relationships in which some aspect of a musical configuration changes while some other aspect remains the same. That is the essence of the "developing variation" technique that Schoenberg had long insisted was implicit in Brahms's motivic textures. And that is one of the features of twelve-tone composition, as Schoenberg practiced it, which allowed him to claim that this method, no less than his earlier "atonal" style, was a "natural" (or even an inevitable) evolution of "classical" or "mainstream" techniques rather than a break with them, despite its rejection of the most salient — indeed, the defining —feature of "tonal" music. Indeed, twelve-tone techniques, by rationalizing the composition of atonal music and making it more orderly and "plannable," significantly strengthened the bonds that connected atonal music with the formal methods of the "classical mainstream." In this sense, it too was a "neoclassical" move, another response to the postwar "call to order."

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Arnold Schoenberg

Twelve-note composition

IRONY CLAIMS ITS DUE

Chapter: CHAPTER 12 In Search of Utopia
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

All the more obviously was this the case when Schoenberg, for all the scorn he poured on "little Modernsky" and his false "Papa Bach" peruke, found himself writing his own allotment of minuets and gavottes. Explaining that away has cost his "defenders" a lot of sweat. Usually the difference between Schoenberg's pastiches and Stravinsky's turns on the absence in Schoenberg's of any actual diatonic melody or triadic harmony. Despite the recourse to eighteenth-century forms, the musical content was still novel, still resembled the melodic and harmonic idiom of the older "expressionist" music. "If Schoenberg does call into service older form types," one such defender has argued, "it is not because he considers them to be 'ideal,' but because he sees in them usages which should not be dispensed with until the novel and more difficult aspects of his musical language are better understood."[23]
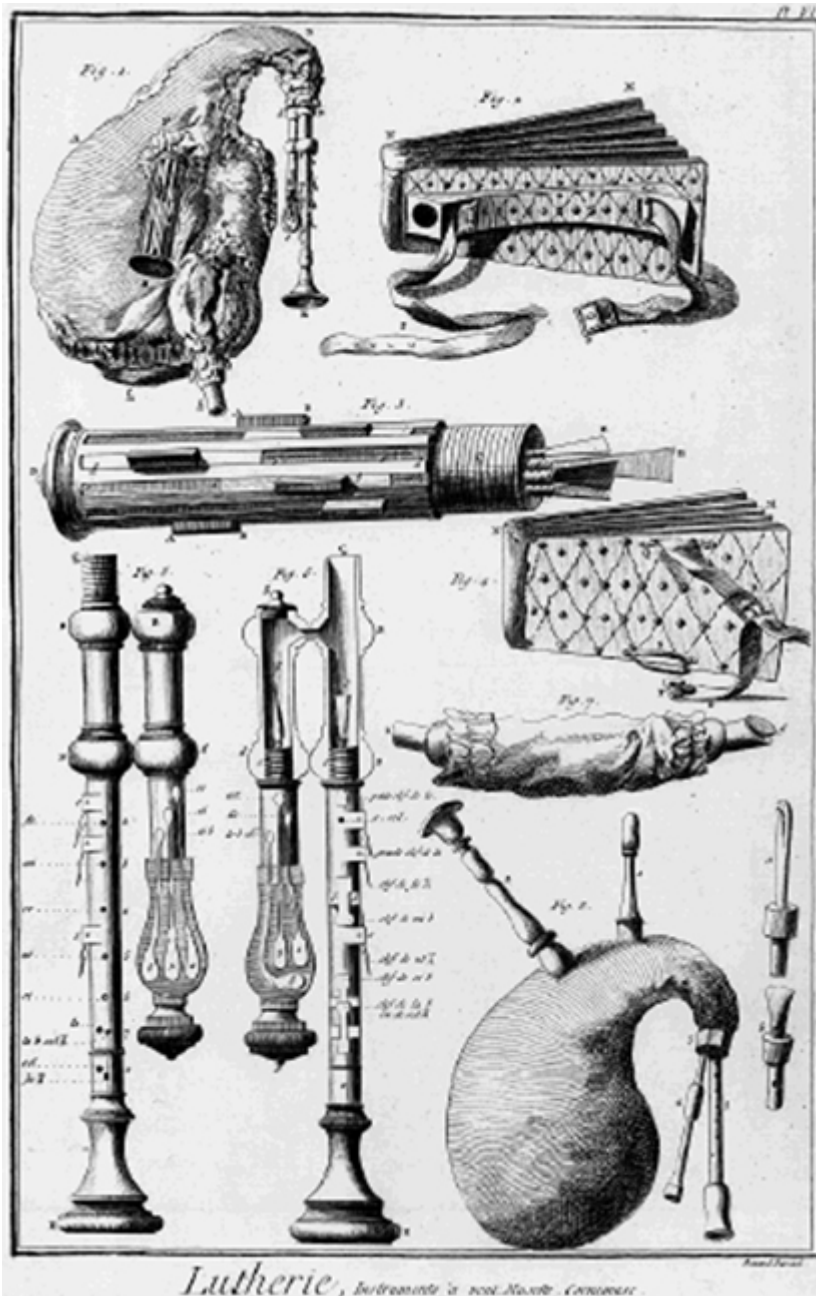
**fig. 12-2 Page from Diderot's *Encyclopédie*: musettes are at upper
left and lower right.**

But this is clearly an equivocation. Before the war he had no such scruples, nor did he offer listeners any
such help with "the novel and more difficult aspects of his musical language." However one tries to explain
it, the contradiction between Schoenberg's "older form types" and his "novel language" after the war greatly
magnified his distance from his former self. Indeed, his first published twelve-tone composition had cast the
tortured musicallanguage of *Erwartung* in the form of a waltz—not merely an "older formal type" but a "light
music" genre! And the gigues and musettes he was now turning out had more familiar repertory
counterparts in the work of Ambroise Thomas, Saint-Säens, Chaikovsky, or Prokofieff than in Bach, even
though Schoenberg invoked Papa Bach in person (and far more explicitly than Stravinsky) by embedding his
very name in the op. 25 tone row. (See the beginning of R_0 in Ex. 12-5, bearing in mind that in German "B"
means B♭and B-natural is "h.") It was, all of it, "mock-light" music. And while little pieces in sectional forms
were always good for working out a technical discipline, if technical studies were all that they were it is not
likely that Schoenberg would have published them.

Some of the early twelve-tone pieces are quite obviously "jesting," and not only in Ortega's sense of the word. Another suite, for an instrumental septet that included three clarinets (op. 29,1926), was to have included a movement called "Foxtrot," before Schoenberg recoiled from *neue Sachlichkeit* and changed the title to the more neutral "Tanzschritte" (dance steps). Op. 24 (1923), a Serenade for chamber septet, uses a pair of literal serenader's instruments (guitar and mandolin) that are rarely employed in "classical" music without parodic intent (most recently, as we may remember, in Mahler's Seventh Symphony, a Schoenberg favorite that Webern had already emulated in his *Five Pieces for Orchestra*).

Two movements in the Serenade are based on tone rows. One of them, in which a baritone voice (the serenader himself) joins the instrumental group, is a parody in many ways. For one thing, it parodies love songs: the text, a sonnet by the fourteenth-century Italian poet Petrarch, is no tender entreaty but a fantasy of violent revenge on a cold mistress. For another, it parodies the "emancipated-dissonance" style, implying that if your poem is about mayhem you have no other choice. And for a third, it parodies the new twelve-tone technique itself—or rather, perhaps, Hauer's version of it as set out in Ex. 12-1.

The singer's part, like the waltz in op. 23, is based throughout on a single untransposed row, treated as a sort of ostinato. Because the text is an Italian sonnet, it is cast in undecasyllabic (11-syllable) lines. There are fourteen lines in all, the last two being an "envoy" in a different meter. Now because Schoenberg's snickering setting is strictly syllabic, each eleven-syllable line leaves a remainder of one note from the tone row. The grim poem constantly gains on the music (see Ex. 12-6), so that the first line uses notes 1–11, the second 12–10, the third 11–9, and so forth, so that each line of the text (like each 5-note phrase in Hauer's *Nomos*, op. 19) is a unique melodic statement. Things come full circle after exactly twelve lines, just in time for the envoy.

The persistent contrast between Schoenberg's heavy content and its feather-light containers was perhaps the most vivid example of postwar irony to be found in all of modernist music. It gave his early twelve-tone music a crooked side that is not only useless to deny, but makes the music all the more genuinely a reflection of its time, all the more genuinely interesting, therefore, as a historical document, and all the more esthetically appealing. As we embark now on a closer look at the Suite for Piano and investigate the multifaceted relationship between its *Grundgestalt* (that is, the complex of twelve-tone row forms in Ex. 12-5) and the music derived from it, that irony will provide the essential link between the technical means and the expressive ends.

ex. 12-6 Arnold Schoenberg, *Serenade*, Op. 24, IV (*Sonett No. 217 von Petrarch*), voice part

ex. 12-7 Arnold Schoenberg, Suite, Op. 25, Gigue, mm. 1–13

The most straightforwardly composed of the five movements is the last one, the Gigue (Ex. 12-7). The tonality-defining properties of the row are best displayed here, since the features we have already remarked on the basis of the row diagram function very obviously and audibly as stable, prominent, and therefore normative aspects of the tonal organization. Most of the time row forms and measures coincide, one-to-one. Thus measure 1 presents P_0, m. 2 I_6, m. 3 I_0, and m. 4 P_6. In mm. 10–13, the reversed row forms pass in review: R_0, RI_6, RI_0, and R_6. And so on. This means that, owing to the tritone invariance, every measure moves either from E to B♭ or from B♭ to E. Measures 1–4 also exploit the other stable invariance property: note that the third eighth-note position in each measure is occupied by the GD♭ tritone that crops up in order positions 3 and 4 in Ex. 12-5. In mm. 10–13, the GD♭ tritones are avoided, but the tritones that appear in order positions 7 and 8 (there are two: DA♭ and F♯C) are ferreted out and placed consistently on the fourth eighth-note position. The combination of constant and changing factors again produces that sense of constant progression that Schoenberg dubbed "developing variation."

The funniest moment in the Suite, surely, is the Trio of the Menuett movement (Ex. 12-8), in which normal and inverted row forms (beginning with P_0 in the left hand and I_6 in the right) are consistently played off one another in a strict rhythmic and contour imitation, producing a strict "mirror canon" (canon by inversion). As in *Pierrot lunaire*, the composer gets no technical points for constructing a contrapuntal tour de force (a poodle with basic twelve-tone training could do so as easily as Schoenberg), but the wildly exaggerated angularity of the writing, wide intervals like ninths and tenths careening up and down, shines such a garish spotlight on the contour inversion as to leave no doubt that the composer is in on the joke.

ex. 12-8 Arnold Schoenberg, Suite, Op. 25, Trio, mm. 34–44

Another overtly joking piece is the Musette that is paired with the Gavotte as the Suite's second movement (Ex. 12-9). *Musette* was the eighteenth-century French word for bagpipe, and a keyboard piece so titled was a mock-bucolic number that imitated the bagpipe drone with an ostinato bass. The GD♭ tritone, which turns up in the same place in every row form in Ex. 12-5, functioned within the row itself as a sort of ostinato, and easily assumed the drone function the Musette required. In the first strain the G alone serves as drone; the full tritone is reserved for the longer second half, where it lends a sense of harmonic closure. With its staccato articulations, its harmonic clarity, and its high tessitura, this clever, jaunty little piece might

plausibly have been signed "Prokofieff." As usual, the dire split between Schoenberg and his circle and the "Franco-Russians" can be much better substantiated in their verbal polemics than in their actual music.

ex. 12-9 Arnold Schoenberg, Suite, Op. 25, Musette, beginning

More complex textures are created in the Suite by pitting row forms against one another in counterpoint, often with punning ambiguities that arise out of their invariance properties. At the very outset, the beginning of the Präludium (Ex. 12-10), the prime form is given complete in the right hand against P_6, its transposition at the tritone, in the left. The texture is thickened to three parts in mm. 2–3 by running the second and third four-note segments (tetrachords) of P_6 simultaneously. The multiply repeated B♭ in m. 3, like every B♭ or E in the piece, is of course a boundary note. And, as is usually the case, it does double duty, as the last note of P_0 and the first of I_6. (The repeated E in the bass in mm. 6–7 is another boundary note doing double duty, linking RI_0 and P_0.)

ex. 12-10 Arnold Schoenberg, Suite, Op. 25, Präludium, beginning

The most-analyzed movement in the Suite is the Menuett (Ex. 12-11), partly because of the "license" with which Schoenberg seems to be breaking his own rules. That license is immediately apparent in the fact that, uniquely, the Menuett does not begin with a "boundary note." The continuation is reassuring, however: following G♭ with E♭, then A♭, then D, identifies it as the fifth note in P_0. Schoenberg himself acknowledged this in an article on twelve-tone composition, and minimized the apparent departure from strict twelve-tone "orthodoxy" with the "excuse" that, the Menuett being the fourth movement of the Suite, "the row has already become familiar" to the listener.

ex. 12-11 Arnold Schoenberg, Suite, Op. 25, Menuett, beginning

He also cites the more interesting fact that the four-note group or tetrachord with which the piece begins (i.e., order positions 5−8) ends with a tritone, just as the first tetrachord does, and that this correspondence or invariance justifies treating the two tetrachords "like independent small sets." If we mentally label the three tetrachords in the row as A, B, and C, the first two measures of the piece pit B and C (right hand in m. 1 and m. 2 respectively) against A (left hand). The whole Menuett, as Schoenberg implies, treats the set as a collection of three quasi-independent tetrachords throughout.

But Schoenberg has been coy. He quotes the first two measures of the Menuett as an illustration to his remarks, but not the third and fourth, or any of the others, since only in the first measure do the notes of each tetrachord come in the order determined by the tone row as a whole. In mm. 3−4, based on I$_6$, the tetrachords interact just as they do in mm. 1−2 (B and C in the right hand over A in the left) but the notes of A come in the order 4 2 1 3, the notes of B in the order 5 8 6 7, and those in C in the order 12 11 10 9. In mm. 5−6, based on P$_6$, the tetrachords come in a different order, B + A in the right hand over C in the left, and the notes within each tetrachord are again presented in a permuted order. In effect, Schoenberg has divided his row into three "independent small sets" that are not truly independent, as none can appear without the others, but which are in effect *unordered*, an even greater "deviation" from what is normally looked upon as strict twelve-tone procedure.

These "licenses," as the Mexican music historian Maria Luisa Vilar-Paya has pointed out, have a purpose—one that is even more strikingly at odds with conventional notions of the "nature" of twelve-tone music.[24] That purpose is the creation of a hierarchy among the pitches in the row, most easily seen at the very end (Ex. 12-12), where the two boundary pitches, E and B♭, appear in close proximity, each participating in what looks—and sounds!—like a traditional "tonal" progression from leading tone to tonic. But under such conditions the B♭ would be a functional tonic, and therefore stable, while the E would be a functional leading

tone, and therefore unstable. The B♭, in other words, has been effectively promoted to a position of priority over E (which conspicuously begins every movement of the suite except the Menuett) as the definer of the contextually created tonality that governs the Suite.

ex. 12-12 Arnold Schoenberg, Suite, Op. 25, Menuett, mm. 31–33

Its status as the pitch of priority can be confirmed in other ways, one of the most interesting (as Vilar-Paya has shown) being the subtle organization of the harmony around B♭ as an axis of symmetry, in which the ubiquitous GD♭ tritone, its notes equidistant from B♭, plays a decisive supporting role. There are even a couple of loose pages among the sketches for the Suite that support this interpretation. (Before Vilar-Paya produced her analysis, significantly enough, nobody suspected the relationship of these sketches to the finished piece.) They are charts that map equidistant intervals surrounding the note C (traditionally the "neutral" theoretical starting point), showing the kind of relationships that may actually be plotted around B♭ in the Menuett. This puts Schoenbergian tonality, even his twelve-tone tonality, in line with that of much if not most of the modernist music we have already encountered, a line that goes back—by way of Bartók and Stravinsky—beyond modernism to Liszt and even Schubert. All of this only gives us more good reason to view the institution of twelve-tone procedures as not only a radical but, in equal measure, a profoundly conservative development.

Notes:

(23) Alan Lessem, "Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Neo-Classicism: The Issues Reexamined," *Musical Quarterly* LXVIII (1982): 538.

(24) Maria Luisa Vilar-Paya, "Schoenberg's Re-centerings: Pitch Organization and Formal Processes in Early Twelve-Tone Music," paper read at the fifty-eighth annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, Pittsburgh, 6 November 1992.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

BACK AGAIN TO BACH

Chapter: CHAPTER 12 In Search of Utopia
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

These desultory remarks on a few salient features of the Suite for Piano, op. 25, could easily be amplified into a complete analysis of the piece—indeed a more complete analysis, in the sense that it can more fully trace the composer's decisions in the very act of composing, than in any other kind of music. That analytical transparency, making twelve-tone technique perhaps the easiest of all compositional methods to demonstrate and teach, and which therefore gave it an aura of uprightness in the spirit of scientific "positivism" (open empirical inquiry), was an important spur to its spread, just as its "artificiality" and "arid intellectualism" (the very same qualities, of course, viewed from a less welcoming perspective) incited resistance.

In any case, from the most arcane of compositional methods, "atonal" composition all at once became the most lucid. It withheld no secrets at all from a determined analyst (although the naked ear might still be baffled). Like a scientific proof, a twelve-tone composition proceeded logically, by inference from an axiomatic premise (the row). No music better illustrated the debunking, materialist, objective, and antimetaphysical spirit of postwar disillusion than this ironic descendant of expressionism, of all prewar styles the most subjective and mystique-ridden. And yet the gnawing tension between poietic transparency and esthesic opacity would never be entirely dispelled.

And there was something else, too, that made twelve-tone music permanently controversial. A tiny hint of it comes at the beginning of the Gavotte (Ex. 12-13), in which the prime form of the row is split, at the outset, between the two hands. The right hand plays the first eight notes of P_0 as a typically grotesque little tune, which the left hand accompanies with notes 9–12. But once the boundary note 12 is reached, it does typical double duty and serves as the fulcrum for a reversal. The B, C, and A that had preceded the B♭ in m. 1 come back in reversed order, producing the beginning of R_0: B♭ A C B, which, as we have long known, in German spells "Bach." Schoenberg does not pursue R_0 beyond this point. Like the extra little incipit in Ex. 12-5, its beginning is there just to "say hello" and make its point.

ex. 12-13 Arnold Schoenberg, Suite, Op. 25, Gavotte, beginning

This time the point is made, sotto voce, in a witty whisper, for the analysts alone. In the Variations for

Orchestra, op. 31 (1928), Schoenberg's first large-scale "public" twelve-tone composition and anything but a jest, the tandem declaration of innovation and birthright is ostentatious and hortatory. The theme on which the variations are based encompasses one complete complex, so to speak, of row forms: first a prime, next a double mirror or retrograde inversion, third an order mirror or retrograde, and finally a contour mirror or inversion, accompanied by another prime. Ex. 12-14a shows the theme as it first appears in the Variations, played by the cellos (joined at the end by the first violins) and harmonized by another complex of row forms, whose special complementary relationship to the melody it accompanies will be something to return to.

ex. 12-14a Arnold Schoenberg, Variations for Orchestra, Op. 31, the theme

Once, in a radio address, Schoenberg stressed the kinship between the drooping contours of his theme and the typically appoggiatura-rich themes of late Romantic compositions by half-jestingly giving it a "tonal" accompaniment (Ex. 12-14b) in "a quite good F major that insistently courts G-flat major."[25] He further commented, "Some people will prefer this treatment to the original. I don't like it, but that is a matter of taste. Why now, if I can also do it that way, do I write a different accompaniment, which is bound to have a less general appeal? All I can say now is that it is not out of malice." Rather than malice, of course, it was

commitment to "New German" ideals of evolutionary progress that, as always, impelled Schoenberg's stylistic development. But in the actual music of the Variations he contrived another, far more pointed, reminder of his stylistic heritage. In the Introduction—that is, the section preceding the first statement of the theme—Schoenberg contrived a pair of measures, each of which corresponded, like many measures in the Piano Suite, to a statement of a single row form. Together, they put P_0 and I_1 in counterpoint (Ex. 12-14c). The four circled notes in Ex. 12-14c, which occupy corresponding order positions (1 and 6) in both row forms, are the notes Schoenberg entrusts to the traditionally portentous trombone (having allowed himself many liberties in the order of presentation of I_1). When so intoned, and doubled by the cellos using "hairpin" dynamics, the BACH motif is difficult to miss (Ex. 12-14d). It is a sort of time bomb.

ex. 12-14b Arnold Schoenberg, Variations for Orchestra, Op. 31, theme as harmonized over Radio Frankfurt in 1931

ex. 12-14c Arnold Schoenberg, Variations for Orchestra, Op. 31, prime and inverted row forms
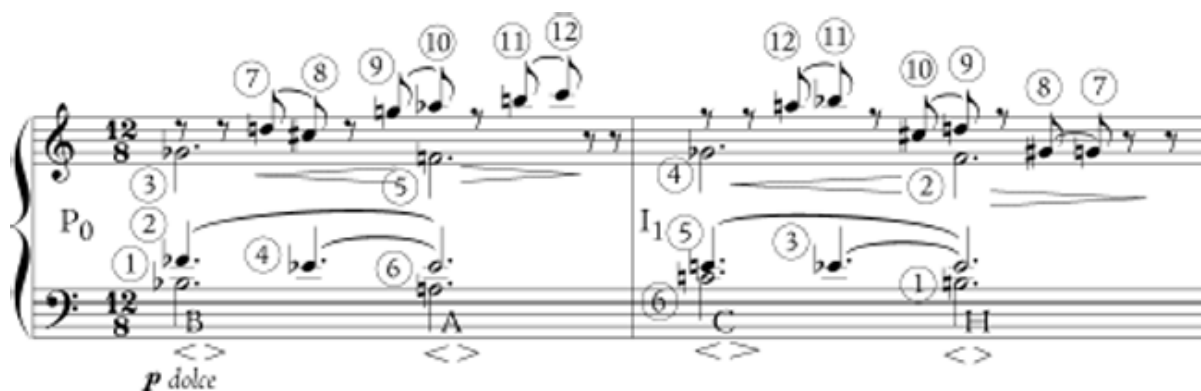
ex. 12-14d Arnold Schoenberg, Variations for Orchestra, Op. 31, mm. 24–25

ex. 12-14e Arnold Schoenberg, Variations for Orchestra, Op. 31, the row forms in Ex. 12-14c trans-posed to reveal additional BACH ciphers
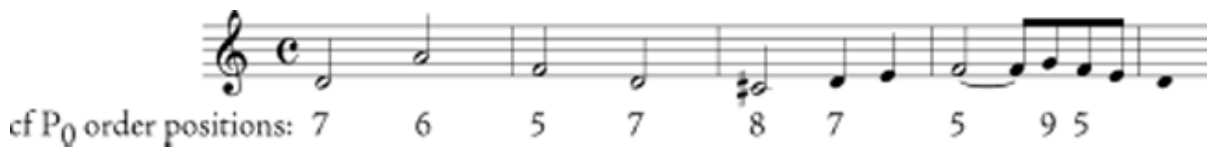
ex. 12-14f J. S. Bach, main subject from *The Art of Fugue*

The tone row, indeed, has been covertly tailored to a Bachian purpose. The notes in order positions 2–5 in any statement of the row or its inversion (or in positions 8–11 in any reversed statement) are a transposition of the BACH set (albeit presented in the easily "correctable" order BCAH/HACB; see Ex. 12-14e). Not only that, but as Schoenberg scholar Ethan Haimo has pointed out,[26] the notes in order positions 5–9 in P_o correspond to the notes in the subject of Bach's crowning testament of his mastery, the *Art of Fugue* (see Ex. 12-14f), venerated by all the Schoenbergians as an epitome of "organicism." The grandiose finale to the Variations, whose 210 measures nearly equal all the rest combined (252), flaunts dozens of BACH allusions, some dramatic (like the ones introduced near the beginning by a double bass recitative in the manner of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony), some woven into tight contrapuntal textures, others building at the end to a blazing climax. Schoenberg's Variations aggressively proclaim the composer's special line of descent from the composer who—and this is in itself significant—was as much everybody's asserted forebear after the Great War as Beethoven had been before it.

But who *was* Bach to Schoenberg? Not at all the same man as "kleine Modernsky's" Papa Bach, whose archaism represented timelessness, and whose abstract mastery represented universality. Schoenberg's Bach was not a universal figurehead but a national one. Bach, for Schoenberg, was above all a German, indeed the greatest of Germans and the fountainhead of German musical art; hence the special venom with which Schoenberg derided "Franco-Russian" attempts to appropriate him. Schoenberg's neoclassicism was uniquely laced with nationalism—the particularly embittered nationalism of a defeated and resentful nation.

His writings abound in passages that underscore this connection. "It was mainly through J. S. Bach," Schoenberg alleged in an essay called "National Music," "that German music came to decide the way things developed, as it has for 200 years."[27] What vouchsafed German domination, moreover, was precisely the technique that Schoenberg saw himself as having inherited from Bach and, through the twelve-tone system, perfecting: namely, "contrapuntal art, i.e., the art of producing every audible figure from one single one."[28] Lest anyone miss the point, Schoenberg spelled out his truculent claims. First, with respect to twelve-tone music: "If at the climax of contrapuntal art, in Bach, something quite new simultaneously begins—the art of development through motivic variation—and in our time, at the climax of art based on harmonic relationships, the art of composing with 'twelve tones related only to each other' begins, one sees that the epochs are very similar."[29] And with reference to himself: "My music, produced on German soil, without foreign influences, is a living example of an art able most effectively to oppose Latin and Slav hopes of hegemony and derived through and through from the traditions of German music"[30] —traditions that went "back to Bach," as the saying went, but a route that in Schoenberg's insistent view only Germans could legitimately take.

The Variations for Orchestra—one of a number of early twelve-tone pieces by Schoenberg and his pupils to invoke the BACH motif, if by far the most impressive—asserted these claims in a manner that went beyond words. This view of his twelve-tone compositions and their heritage had informed what is now Schoenberg's most notorious remark, which he made in conversation with his teaching assistant, the musicologist Josef Rufer, in the summer of 1921 or 1922: "Today I have discovered something which will assure the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years."[31] Needless to say, ever since Rufer published it in 1959 this has been one of the most pounced-upon assertions in the history of European music. A representative defense of Schoenberg's position (by George Perle, already familiar to us as an analyst, and one of many European and American composers who have devoted their careers to enlarging on the Schoenbergian legacy) excuses the rhetorical excess by placing it in historical context. "There was much speculation, in the years immediately following the First World War, on the likelihood that the great Austro-German tradition,

to which we still owe the major part of our standard orchestral repertory, was coming to an end," Perle wrote. "Why should we be surprised that a post-bellum Austro-German composer would hope that that tradition had not 'had its day'?"[32] Others have not found it so easy to overlook the distinction between survival and supremacy, especially after the Second World War, which was fought precisely over the issue of Germany's claim to world supremacy in an arena much larger than music.

Notes:

(25) Arnold Schoenberg, "Variations for Orchestra, op. 31," *The Score* (July 1960); quoted in Glenn Watkins, *Soundings: Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer, 1988), p. 335.

(26) Ethan Haimo, *Schoenberg's Serial Odyssey: The Evolution of His Twelve-Tone Method, 1914–1928.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 162.

(27) Schoenberg, "National Music" (1931), *Style and Idea*, p. 170.

(28) *Ibid.*, p. 171.

(29) *Ibid.*

(30) *Ibid.*, p. 173.

(31) Josef Rufer, *The Works of Arnold Schoenberg: A Catalogue of His Compositions, Writings, and Paintings*, trans. Dika Newlin (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), p. 45.

(32) George Perle, "The Dark Side of Musicology" (letter to the editor in answer to R. Taruskin, "The Dark Side of Modern Music," *The New Republic*, 5 September 1988).

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CONSOLIDATION

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Whatever the motivation, Schoenberg's career was dedicated henceforth to justifying the claims he had made for his method, elaborating and standardizing procedures so that its neoclassical principles could indeed become law. The greatest emphasis was placed on whatever might enhance the status of the row as *Grundgestalt*, with the result that principles of symmetry and complementation, already noticeable in Schoenberg's earliest twelve-tone works, would become the basic determinants of structure. Thus twelve-tone music, for all that it descended from expressionism (at least insofar as some leading composers of the one tendency became leading composers of the other), quickly metamorphosed into a haven for technical research and compositional tours de force. Sharing the predilection of all other neoclassicists for abstract or generic forms, twelve-tone composers went further than any others in ordering the content of their work according to rational structural principles, making content in effect tantamount to form.

An important structural principle that Schoenberg hit upon at the time of the Variations (one of the earliest works to exemplify it) could only be described in exceedingly cumbersome terms during his lifetime. Richard S. Hill, for example, a music scholar and librarian who in an article of 1936 gave the first comprehensive description of twelve-tone technique in English, spoke of "pieces in which the 'row' is divided into two six-note groups, the first of which in the prime contains the same notes as the second half of the mirror, but in a different order, the other halves being necessarily related similarly."[33]

Schoenberg himself, in a letter to Rufer dating from 1950, the year before his death, tried to explain his purposes as well as (still cumbersomely) describing the method: "Personally I endeavour to keep the series such that the inversion of the first six tones a fifth lower gives the remaining six tones. The consequent, the seventh to twelfth tones, is a different sequence of these second six tones. This has the advantage that one can accompany melodic phrases made from the first six tones with harmonies made from the second six tones, without getting doublings."[34] Doublings were to be avoided, in Schoenberg's oft-stated view, because they strengthened some tones at the expense of others, compromising the implied equality of "twelve tones, related only to each other" under the aegis of emancipated dissonance. Yet we have already seen that Schoenberg's actual practice admitted tonal hierarchies. They always would. As with most theorist-composers, his stated principles (or at least the principles he stated to outsiders) were purer than his deeds—which is less to accuse him of hypocrisy than to suggest we seek the reasons for the technique in question in his most basic, and therefore unarticulated, assumptions. What may seem at first an anachronistic or extrinsic approach has in fact proved the most revealing.

Nowadays, following a nomenclature first proposed by Milton Babbitt, a mathematically adept American theorist and composer, rows that meet the criteria defined by Hill and Schoenberg are called "combinatorial," and the technique of contriving and employing them, "combinatoriality." In mathematics, combinatoriality is a branch of probability theory that analyzes permutations (i.e., the reordering of sets) and combinations (i.e., principles of sampling from sets). It is a useful analogy for studying the properties of twelve-tone rows, since all rows are permutations of a single set (the "aggregate," as we have been calling it, or more simply but vaguely, the contents of the chromatic scale).

A row is combinatorial if from its various row-forms corresponding samples can be drawn that, when combined, produce invariant relationships that can be exploited as "basic shapes" (in this case harmonic constants) in the composition. In the most consummate instance, noted by Hill and Schoenberg, the corresponding segments of combinatorially related row forms complete the aggregate. Schoenberg sought out such rows because he considered them to offer a basis for a true—that is to say distinctive, consistent, and self-contained—twelve-tone harmonic system.

Look again at Ex. 12-14a, the theme from the Variations for Orchestra, op. 31, together with its harmonization. At the beginning, P_0 is pitted against I_9, the former providing the melody, the latter the harmony. In Ex. 12-15, the two row forms, labeled A and B, are notated abstractly, one atop the other, with their respective six-note segments or hexachords labeled with subscripts $_1$ and $_2$. The pitch content of A_1 and A_2, two halves of a single row, are of course by definition mutually exclusive. But in this particular combination of inversion and transposition, so are A_1 and B_1. And from this it must follow that A_1 and B_2 have identical pitch content (as must A_2 and B_1). Segments A_1 and B_2, in other words, are permutations of a single (six-note) set. They have the same relationship to one another as the row forms of which they are a part. And—the converse of this relationship—A_1 and B_1, though mutually exclusive in pitch content, have identical intervallic orders—another combination of constancy and difference that can be compositionally exploited.

When P_0 is put in counterpoint with I_9 all of these reciprocal and complementary relationships can be turned to structural account. Aggregates are completed in two dimensions: horizontal ($A_1 + A_2$, $B_1 + B_2$) and vertical ($A_1 + B_1$, $A_2 + B_2$). In addition, the cross pairs A_1 and B_2 or B_1 and A_2, being identical in pitch content but different in ordering, can be exploited either as harmonic constants or as variations on a basic shape. With all of these features in play, the motivic consistency of the music—its "relatedness quotient"—is vastly enhanced. Within an esthetic that valued music according to precisely this criterion (even to the point of declaring it an emblem of national supremacy), combinatoriality produced a self-evidently superior music; its discovery constituted incontrovertible musical progress.

But there is an even more particular consistency in play here. The row forms in Ex. 12-15 have been contrived and selected to produce harmonic symmetry at another level of combinatoriality. A_1 begins with a tritone, B♭E, that is automatically mirrored by GC♯ in B_1, the inversion. But since a tritone contains six semitones, and B_1 is at a transposition of 9 semitones from A_1, the /0 6/ tritone in A_1 is answered by /3 9/, giving a sum of /03 6 9/, a symmetrical division of the octave known to us since the days of Liszt as the circle of minor thirds. But Schoenberg has also included the reciprocal tritone (C♯G) in the second hexachord of the P_0, so that the /0 3 6 9/ coincidence happens twice when the two row forms are put in counterpoint, forming another harmonic constant.

ex. 12-15 Combinatorial row forms in Arnold Schoenberg, Variations for Orchestra, Op. 31

What is true of P_0 and I_9 must necessarily also be true of the next pairing in the harmonized theme, R_0 and RI_9 (the same two row forms reversed). But now the reciprocal tritones will be found in the reciprocal order positions: 4–5 and 11–12 rather than 1–2 and 8–9. This kind of relationship can be exploited for its punning resemblances to more familiar, functional harmonies: by combining P_0 and I_9 at the very outset, Schoenberg contrives to begin the Variations on a "diminished seventh chord," a traditional evoker of portent or suspense. But the relationship also produces an abstract and internal consistency: every phrase of the theme as harmonized displays the same basic shape (the constant C♯EGB♭, or sum of two tritones) and surrounds it with a different intervallic configuration. It is this extreme (and extremely controllable) consistency, which Schoenberg did not attempt to explain to his radio audience in 1931, that led him to prefer (or to argue in favor of) the twelve-tone harmonization of his theme over the "tonal" one. It is secured by combinatoriality.

Having discovered these possibilities, Schoenberg went back to the laboratory, so to speak, and gave them a concentrated investigation in a pair of piano pieces, op. 33a and 33b, that resembled the ones in op. 23 and opus 25 except that now he felt secure enough in his new structural principles not to tie the pieces to familiar or archaic genres, preferring, in the use of the neutral designation *Klavierstück*, to imply that the working out of the row relationships sufficed to generate the form. Ex. 12-16 shows the first page of each piece (the first published in Vienna in 1929, the second published in San Francisco by Henry Cowell's New Music Edition in 1932), together with the combinatorial row forms that in their interaction have engendered the musical shapes.

It was in these pieces that Schoenberg made it a rule of his own combinatorial practice, as stated in his letter to Rufer, to have the prime and inverted row forms stand at the distance of a perfect fifth. As we have seen in the case of the Variations, where the interval of transposition was a minor third, transposition by a fifth is not the only one that can produce the desired complementation. As Schoenberg confided to Rufer, he wished to ally his twelve-tone practice with what he considered to be "an acoustical law of nature—that between a note and its strongest and most frequent overtone."[35] Nor can we fail to recall that the fifth relation, as embodied in harmonically defined binary structures like "sonata form," is the one that traditionally governed the form of "tonal" music.

This is symptomatic of Schoenberg's postwar ambivalence. It has been apparent since our first comparison of his twelve-tone music with his rival Hauer's that Schoenberg's immediate inclination was to synthesize the novel technique with as many aspects of traditional practice as possible (and that he regarded multiplying its points of contact with tradition as technical progress), while Hauer, in his very primitiveness, displayed a tendency that was (even if only superficially or trivially) far more radical than Schoenberg's.

ex. 12-16 Opening of Arnold Schoenberg, *Klavierstücke*, Op. 33a and 33b with a summary of its combinatorial row forms

Hauer's *Nomos* pieces are nothing if not formally idiosyncratic and antitraditional. Seeking to place them in relation to a relevant cultural context, Gregory Dubinsky associates them not with any other contemporary music but with the public poetry readings of the time, highly declamatory affairs at which revolutionary sentiments were often given veiled expression. Dubinsky compares Hauer's monophonic or primitively homophonic compositions with declaimed poems, each musical phrase corresponding with a line of poetry, larger groupings with stanzas. The paucity of performance directions in Hauer's *Nomos* pieces, such as dynamics, articulation, and tempo markings, were an invitation, Dubinsky suggests, "to deliver a natural, affecting declamation of Hauer's lines of music"[36] according to the rhythms of heightened public speech.

But of course nothing could have been further from Schoenberg's expressive purposes than that sort of staged improvisation. Schoenberg saw in twelve-tone music an instrument for ever-greater control over those "organic" shaping functions that had always defined the greatness of the German musical tradition, and that Schoenberg saw epitomized in his own technique of developing variation. These principles are given

a bravura display in the progressively denser, more elaborate combinatorial relations on which the piano pieces of opus 33 are based.

The beginning of op. 33a, for example, consists of a series of six four-note chords, the first three (m. 1) representing a harmonic segmentation of P_0 and the second a segmentation of its combinatorial mate, I_5. The next time the chordal idea is sounded, P_0 and I_5 are juxtaposed vertically (m. 10) and answered by their retrogrades, R_0 and RI_5, in m. 11. Measures 1 and 2 each contain a single aggregate. Measures 10 and 11 contain four aggregates apiece: one in the right hand, one in the left hand, and two formed by the combinations $A_1 + B_1$ and $A_2 + B_2$. Each note in these measures has a double function, participating in two aggregate-completions, one horizontal and the other vertical.

Notes:

(33) Richard S. Hill, "Schoenberg's Tone-Rows and the Tonal System of the Future," *Musical Quarterly* XXII (1936): 14–37.

(34) Arnold Schoenberg to Josef Rufer, 8 April 1950; Josef Rufer, *Composition with Twelve Notes Related Only to One Another*, trans. Humphrey Searle (2nd ed., London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1961), p. 95.

(35) Rufer, *Composition with Twelve Tones*, p. 95.

(36) Gregory Dubinsky, *Six Essays*, Chap. 1.

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Alban Berg

Twelve-note composition

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Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The first composers after Schoenberg to adopt his twelve-tone methods were, naturally enough, his former pupils Berg and Webern. Berg's first essay using aspects of the new technique was the Chamber Concerto for violin, piano, and an ensemble of thirteen wind instruments (1925), the first piece he composed after finishing *Wozzeck*. It was a fiftieth-birthday offering to Schoenberg and, as we saw in chapter 6, its row material incorporated the names Schoenberg Berg and Webern as pitch ciphers. As in some of Schoenberg's early twelve-tone compositions like the *Serenade*, op. 24, Berg's use of tone rows in the Chamber Concerto was sporadic.

The first composition in which Berg attempted a thoroughgoing application of Schoenbergian principles of *Reihenkomposition* ("serial composition") was a tiny song *Schliesse mir die Augen beide* (1925; Berg had already made a "tonal" setting of the same poem by Theodor Storm in 1907). Here Berg adopted a row of a type his own pupil Fritz Heinrich Klein (1892–1977) had "discovered" the year before and published in a quasi-scientific article called "Die Grenze der Halbtonwelt" ("The frontiers of the semitone world"): namely, a symmetrical all-interval series (Ex. 12-17a). Each of the hexachords in the row contains all of the intervals from semitone to perfect fourth (or when inverted, from the perfect fifth to the major seventh), with the self-inverting tritone coming once, in the middle, as the boundary between the two hexachords. As a by-product of the row's structure, pitches flanking the central tritone (order positions 6/7) form tritone-related—hence self-inverting — pairs: GD♭ (positions 5/8), AE♭ (positions 4/9), CG♭ (3/10), EB♭ (2/11), FC♭ [B] (1/12). One could say that this row maximized the tritone-symmetrical properties of the row on which Schoenberg had built his Suite for Piano, op. 25.

fig. 12-3 Berg and Schoenberg in 1914.

Berg used the row again as the basis for his next major work, the *Lyric Suite* for string quartet (1926). As he set it out in his sketches this time (Ex. 12-17b), Berg treated the inversions independently, so that every interval from the semitone to the major seventh is represented exactly once. And then (like Schoenberg in the Menuett from his Suite for Piano, op. 25), Berg reordered the set to emphasize its cognates with "tonal" practice: first into a circle of fifths, then into a diatonic scale. When the row is reordered in these ways, the tritone pairs no longer radiate out from the center but occupy analogous positions in the two hexachords (1/7, 2/8, 3/9, 4/10, 5/11, 6/12). Finally (and most "licentiously" with respect to the original order), in various movements Berg exchanged the positions of certain notes so as to produce new rows (Ex. 12-18). Again we see the role of playful "research" or "precompositional work" in the elaboration of the twelve-tone method.
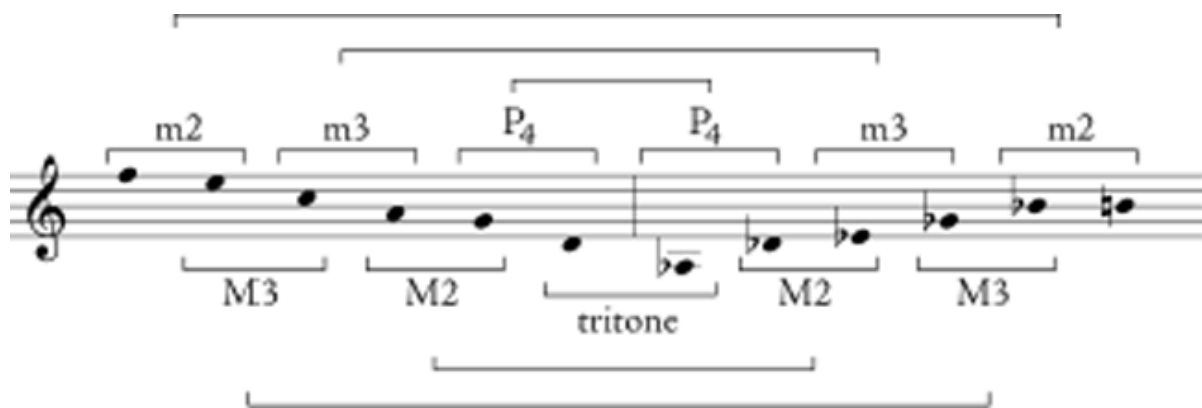
ex. 12-17a All-interval row in Alban Berg, *Schliesse mir die Augen beide*

ex. 12-17b All-interval row in Alban Berg, *Lyric Suite*

But all of these idiosyncratic row-manipulations and permutations (as well as equally meticulous rhythmic and tempo calculations) are placed at the service of an expressivity as intense as anything in *Wozzeck*. The very titles of the six movements in the *Lyric Suite—Allegretto gioviale* ("jolly allegro"), *Andante amoroso* ("lovestruck andante"), *Allegro misterioso* and *Trio ecstatico, Adagio appassionato, Presto delirando* ("delirious Presto"), *Largo desolato* ("broken-hearted Largo")—and the use of musical quotations (including a famous one from the Prelude of *Tristan und Isolde* in the final movement) have always struck listeners and critics as the makings of a "latent opera," as Berg s pupil, the critic Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, called it.[37] During the 1970s, a group of scholars, working independently, pieced together the opera's libretto and its dramaturgy.

ex. 12-18 Permutations of *Lyric Suite* row

One of them, Douglass Green, discovered a sketch that revealed the last movement—the *Largo desolato*, which contained the *Tristan* quotation—to be a secret setting of a despairing poem by Baudelaire, *De profundis clamavi* ("Out of the depths have I cried unto thee" [Psalm 130]), as translated by the German poet Stefan George (Ex. 12-19).[38] A year later, George Perle discovered the printed score in which Berg wrote out, for the benefit of his secret lover, Hanna Fuchs-Robettin, all of the coded symbolic occurrences of her initials and his (HF/AB = BF/AB♭ as named in German). Looking back at Ex. 12-18, it is easy now to see that the puzzling "licenses" Berg took with the order of the twelve-tone row were all contrived to produce conjunctions of the lovers' initials (hence, symbolically, the conjunction of their persons).

Hanna Fuchs's tritone-related initials were already the boundary notes of the original all-interval row "discovered" by F. H. Klein (as were his own), and this is probably what gave Berg the idea for the hidden program. The first permutation, the exchange of A and F♯/G♭ in Ex. 12-18b, puts the composer's initials together. The inversion-plus-permutation in Ex. 12-18c, while keeping HF at the boundaries, produces an initial tetrachord that if transposed up a fourth would give the two sets of initials side by side. The transposition in Ex. 12-18d achieves this, and the three additional boxes identify other places where other transpositions would have the same effect. The elaborate transformation-plus-transposition in Exx. 12-18ef, which corresponds to the section of the movement that contains the *Tristan* quote, manages to put the symbolic tetrachord at the end, meanwhile folding (or "couching") AB within HF. As the music of the Largo proceeds to its desolate conclusion, the tetrachord is transposed to pitch levels at which the musical intervals lose their association with the lovers' initials, as if to suggest their loss of identity in death (or in the ecstasy of love)—a clear reference to the myth of Tristan and Isolde.

ex. 12-19 *Largo desolato* from *Lyric Suite*, with Baudelaire-George text underlaid, end

It is fair to ask whether any of this truly enhances the meaning of the *Lyric Suite* for anyone not a party to the affair. We knew about the presence of *Tristan* in the *Lyric Suite*, after all, before we knew about AB and HF. Does the particular reference add resonance to the general, or vice versa? Professor Perle himself has cautioned that to suggest that the meaning of the music is confined to the note symbolism is vastly to diminish it. Only in the case of the last movement, with an actual text that becomes an ineluctable subtext to anyone aware of its presence, do the new discoveries "change" the music (or rather, change the way in which a listener apprehends it). Our purpose in discussing them here is not interpretive but historical: the new discoveries shed additional light on what the earliest practitioners thought to be the advantage of the twelve-tone method, not only in insuring the pervasive presence of a musical *Grundgestalt*, but also in finding new ways of relating the form and the meaning of a musical composition.

The fact, moreover, that both Schoenberg and Berg were drawn, in their twelve-tone music, to rows that

exhibited intervallic symmetries was far from coincidental; for such harmonic symmetries were easily projected, at least conceptually, as structural symmetries to guide the composing hand and govern the resultant form. Berg's fascination with the liminal—with the border, that is, between the tonal and the atonal—was also well served by the twelve-tone technique, since now the harmonic consonances and occasional linear functions that had impinged (often with parodic effect) on the otherwise nonfunctional motivic texture in *Wozzeck* could be integrated into the row *material* itself, becoming part of the *Grundgestalt* rather than a graft or a hybrid, and thus come closer to the traditional ideal of "organic" unity.

Berg exploited these resonances in his second opera, *Lulu* (after a pair of plays about a ruthless femme fatale by Frank Wedekind, a German writer born in San Francisco), of which the last act was left unorchestrated at his death. (The act was completed by the Austrian composer Friedrich Cerha and first performed in 1979.) Berg brought them to an eloquent culmination in his last finished work, a concerto that had been commissioned by the American violinist Louis Krasner early in 1935, and that Berg wrote as a memorial to his young friend Manon Gropius—the daughter of Gustav Mahler's widow by her second husband, Walter Gropius, a famous architect—who died of polio, aged eighteen, in April of that year. Dedicated "to the memory of an angel," the Concerto makes no secret of its programmatic content, with a third movement that reaches a truly catastrophic climax, and a finale full of the pathos of mourning, and finally of acceptance.

Where the *Lyric Suite* had managed to educe allusions to works of Wagner and Zemlinsky from its twelve-tone strategies, the Violin Concerto alludes to even more frankly diatonic material: a South Austrian folk song to represent Manon's carefree early life (and possibly, as some commentators have suggested, Berg's as well), and a chorale, *Es ist genug* ("It is enough"), adapted from a striking harmonization by Bach, the text of which, entered in the score at the appropriate point in the finale, has an appropriately funereal import.

What made it possible to integrate this material into a twelve-tone context was the nature of the row, which consists mainly of an alternation of major and minor thirds. As first played by the violin during the introductory measures, it takes the form shown in Ex. 12-20a. By the time it is played, the listening ear has been conditioned, by the passage immediately preceding it (Ex. 12-20b) to interpret it as a succession of triads in a "reverse circle-of-fifths," followed by a whole tone tetrachord that coincides with the beginning of the chorale tune (Ex. 12-20c).

ex. 12-20a Alban Berg, Violin Concerto, entrance of solo violin (mm. 15–18)

ex. 12-20b Alban Berg, Violin Concerto, mm. 11–15

ex. 12-20c J. S. Bach, harmonized chorale, "Es ist genug!"

The next time the violin enters, it plays the inversion of its initial statement (hence the inversion of the row itself, Ex. 12-20d), and in so doing reveals its extraordinary properties. If the row and its inversion are linked up by reversing the latter (Ex. 12-20e), and if the gap that is left between the A at one end and the F at the other is plugged by the G with which both row forms begin, then a perfectly symmetrical pitch circle is achieved (Ex. 12-20f), in which any prime form of the row coincides with the reversed inversion at a transposition of a major third down, and any inverted row coincides with the reversed prime at a complementary transposition of a major third down. In effect, the reversed rows have been eliminated as an independent form. The row is its own retrograde. Writing out the prime form so that it starts and ends on the Eb, which splits the whole-tone tetrachord down the middle, produces an intervallic palindrome that shows this effect most clearly (Ex. 12-20g).

ex. 12-20d Alban Berg, Violin Concerto, mm. 24–27 (solo violin)

ex. 12-20e Alban Berg, Violin Concerto, symmetrical pitch circle formed by prime and inverted row forms

ex. 12-20f Alban Berg, Violin Concerto, symmetrical circle laid out as a melodic palindrome

(Adapted from Perle, *The Operas of Alban Berg*, Vol. 2, p. 251.)

ex. 12-20g Alban Berg, Violin Concerto, intervallic palindrome condensed

Several passages in the Concerto exploit these symmetries through transpositions by major thirds, but more conspicuous are the passages in which Berg transposes the row by minor thirds to emphasize cognates between its structure and the structural functions of traditional harmony. The very beginning of the concerto is the best example of this, and its recapitulation at the end to produce the concerto's final cadence shows that Berg thought of the effect not only as an expressive resource, but also as a structural principle to unify the concerto tonally. (As we have already seen in *Wozzeck*, though, the distinction between the structural and the expressive in Berg's music is ultimately as gratuitous as it is invidious.)

The first eight measures, shown in Ex. 12-21a, have a traditional (neoclassical?) "preluding" character, produced by the steadily rocking arpeggios, reminiscent of the old *style brisé*, the "broken (chord) style" of the baroque lute or keyboard suite. The violin alternates throughout with a harp, standing in for the lute/harpsichord, that is doubled by a group of three clarinets which sometimes follow the harp notes, at other times pull tones out of the arpeggios to sustain them as background harmony. The violin's first arpeggio, cunningly enough, consists of the four open strings, as if to emphasize the preludizing (or "ricercata") effect, a mock-aimless improvisation in which one noodles on the instrument in search of an idea.

To isolate the pitches of the open violin strings, Berg "samples" the row, selecting order positions 1, 3, 5, and 7—that is, every other note. The violin's next arpeggio consists of the complementary sample: 2, 4, 6, and 8. The "chord" produced this time is a whole-tone tetrachord to match the one at the row's end. The implied progression of the starting pitches—G to B♭—suggests a traditional tonal move from the tonic minor to the relative major, and Berg reinforces the parallel (as well as foreshadowing the eventual key of the Bach chorale in the finale) by deriving the harp's arpeggios from P_3, the row transposed up a minor third. The two row forms are thus juxtaposed in a sort of hocketing counterpoint, as set forth in Ex. 12-21b, which forges a link between them that will hold throughout the Concerto.

The coda of the finale, given in Ex. 12-22, consists of one last full statement of the chorale tune but without its internal repeats. The first phrase (mm. 214–219) is played by the winds; the second (mm. 220–222) by the winds plus pizzicato strings; and the last, falling phrase (F-D-C-B♭), to which the words "Es ist genug" are repeated, is assigned first, *molto adagio*, to the solo violin, thence to the trumpet (accompanied by the traditional "brass chorale"), and finally, in augmentation, *espressivo e amoroso*, to the French horns. The accompaniment to the chorale consists of phrases extracted from the row.

At m. 215 the violin is given a sequence of rising whole-tone tetrachords that echo the chorale's beginning; its flourish before it takes up the tune in m. 222 consists of the first tetrachord of I_2 (=R_{10}, positions 4–7). The last chorale phrase is accompanied by ribbons of arpeggios in many transpositions, all of them referable to the array given in Ex. 12-20f. The last of these, in the solo violin (mm. 226–228), after a preliminary pair of notes (D♭-F) that apes the preceding entrance (solo orchestral violin in m. 225) at the fourth, consists of one last statement of the row, at P_2, which allows it to end, rather than begin, on G. The French horn, having finished the last chorale phrase, appends a final muted statement of the whole-tone tetrachord, inverted so that it descends to another G. The harp and winds sound the chorale's tonic for the last time, in an "added-sixth" variant that admits the concluding G as a consonance.

The chord thus created, B♭DFG, had an important poetic resonance: Mahler had ended the finale of *Das Lied von der Erde*, his "symphony with voices," on a similar added-sixth chord; that movement was called "Der Abschied" ("The farewell"). But there is an "introversive" echo as well: the chord combines the first pair of notes in each of the opening arpeggios (see Ex. 12-21a). That this reference is intended to function at once as closure and summation on both poetic and tonal levels is confirmed by the explicit echoes of the opening arpeggios in the orchestral violins and the double bass, which supply the concerto's concluding notes.

ex. 12-21a Alban Berg, Violin Concerto, mm. 1–8

ex. 12-21b Alban Berg, Analytical sketch for Violin Concerto, mm. 1–8

In keeping with the predilections we observed in *Wozzeck*, Berg used the resources of twelve-tone technique so as to achieve an integration of eclectic ingredients that continually cross the threshold between the functionally tonal and the motivically atonal. His art remained one of affective association, his expressive aims remained traditionally humanistic, concerned with the representation, and possible transmission, of subjective feelings like erotic love (in the *Lyric Suite*), or grief and consolation (in the Concerto). It was to these ends that Berg sublimated the intellectual curiosity that attracted him to technical tours de force. His obsession with motivic and harmonic symmetries acted as a useful counterfoil to his representational bent, enabling his music to be at once eclectic and economical in a way that interests analysts, and giving his music, to a perhaps greater degree than that of the other early Viennese atonalists, strong appeal on both the poietic and esthesic planes.

Notes:

(37) Theodor W. Adorno, *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link*, trans. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 104.

(38) Douglas Green, "Berg's De Profundis: The Finale of the *Lyric Suite*"; George Perle, "The Secret Program of the *Lyric Suite*"; both in the *International Alban Berg Society Newsletter*, no. 5 (April 1977).

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Anton Webern

Palindrome in music

CLARIFICATION

Chapter: CHAPTER 12 In Search of Utopia
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

fig. 12-4 Webern in the Ötztal Alps, July 1937.

With Webern the situation has been somewhat different. Drawn even more strongly than Schoenberg or Berg to symmetrically constructed rows, he was also drawn to extremes of structural rigor and economy that vastly exceeded theirs, reflecting his own personal predilections as we have already come to know them from the radically compressed "expressionistic" works encountered in chapter 6. "Adherence to the row is strict, often burdensome," Webern wrote, "but it is *salvation*!"[39] It provided a "new law"—*Nomos*—that made larger forms possible again. But even Webern's larger forms were tiny. And his utopian vision of twelve-tone music as a discipline for musicians and a salvation for music has come, for reasons neither he nor any other composer could have predicted during his lifetime, to characterize the technique in the eyes of those who have cast themselves as his creative progeny, and to limit its scope.

ex. 12-22 Alban Berg, Violin Concerto, coda

Webern's first twelve-tone composition was a little piano piece called *Kinderstück* ("Children's piece"), composed in 1924. His next twelve-tone study, a piano piece in the form of a minuet (1925), again underscored the close relationship between the new technique and the general "disciplinary" aims of neoclassicism. Over the course of the next twenty years Webern completed a round dozen works intended for publication—two orchestral, three choral, one for piano, four for chamber ensembles, and two sets of songs—using the technique his teacher had invented. Their total duration is less than the combined length of Berg's *Lyric Suite* and Violin Concerto. But their impact would be extraordinary. While Schoenberg invented (or, as he preferred to say, "discovered") the twelve-tone technique, it was Webern who provided the paramount model for its later development and use.

ex. 12-23 Jacob Obrecht, *Missa Graecorum*, cantus firmi from Gloria, Agnus I and Agnus III

It may have been Webern's training in musicology, then primarily an antiquarian field, that predisposed him to take a more purely intervallic view of twelve-tone composition than the other members of his circle. He was aware of the many works by such fifteenth-century masters as Henricus Isaac (on whom he wrote a doctoral dissertation), Jacob Obrecht, Josquin des Prez, and others, in which a cantus firmus was turned upside down or back to front for the sake of variety or for the display of a sometimes hermetic virtuosity, and liked to claim the "Netherlanders," as they were then called, as his immediate forebears. Comparison of three versions of the tenor in Obrecht's *Missa Graecorum* (Ex. 12-23), a "Webernian" work dating from around 1490, might almost seem to validate the whimsical claim.

But the properties that ideally remained "occult" in the work of the Netherlanders, buried in the middle of the texture, often played on the crystal-clear surface in Webern's work. The first and second movements of his Variations for Piano, op. 27 (1936), for example, of which the row is given in Ex. 12-24a, respectively "foreground" or "thematize" intervallic symmetry in two dimensions. In the first movement, row forms are consistently paired with their retrogrades and juxtaposed in counterpoint to form little palindromes that are nothing if not salient to the ear.

The first such palindrome (Ex. 12-25) can serve as paradigm. The right hand begins with P_0, the left with R_0; at the halfway point, when each has completed one hexachord, the hands reverse their assignments so that the left completes the prime, the right the retrograde. Not only the registral distribution of the two row forms and the pitch succession, but also the rhythm is exactly reversed around the fulcrum symbolized in notation by the sixteenth rest in m. 4; that is what makes the mirror-writing so easily observable. And so it remains throughout. Note that the row has been deliberately constructed so as to make the distinctively thematic alternation of dyads (sevenths and ninths) and single notes all but unavoidable. And note, too, that the trichord produced by order positions 6–8, which crosscut the hexachords, can be arranged to form the equally distinctive "atonal triad," a chord that by the 1930s had (as we know) a distinguished history. Again, a distinctive sonority is given a distinctive (in this case conjunctive) function.

ex. 12-24a Anton Webern rows and their properties: Variations for Piano, Op. 27 (1936)

ex. 12-24b Anton Webern rows and their properties: Symphony, Op. 21 (1928)

ex. 12-24c Anton Webern rows and their properties: Quartet, Op. 28 (1938)
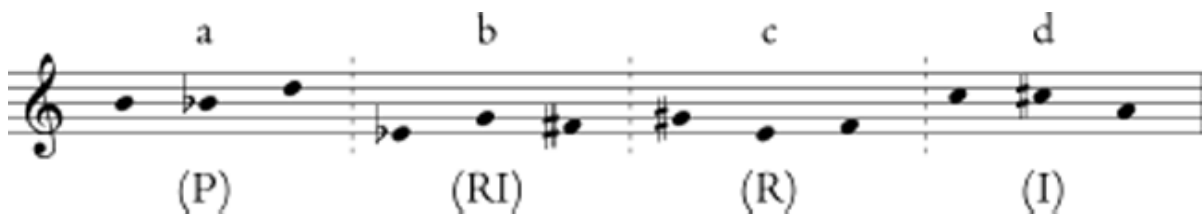
ex. 12-24d Anton Webern rows and their properties: Concerto, Op. 24 (1934)
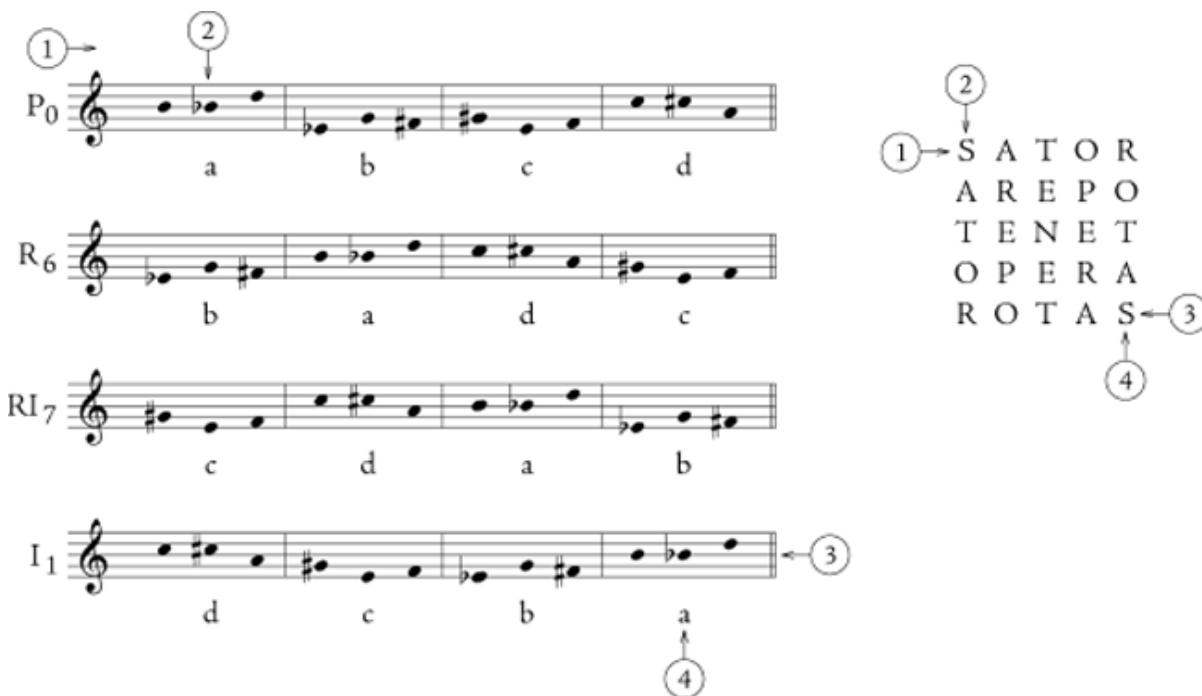
ex. 12-24e Anton Webern row forms arranged in magic square: Concerto, Op. 24

ex. 12-25 Anton Webern, Variations for Piano, Op. 27, I, mm. 1–7

In the second movement (Ex. 12-26), row forms are paired contrapuntally with their inversions around an axis of symmetry that can just as easily be discerned by ear: the first full measure has the first of four pairs of As played by the two hands in succession. (The others are in mm. 9, 13, and 19; they come once per "cursus," or run-through, of the paired rows.) Thus A is identified as the axis of a fully elaborated symmetrical array such as we first encountered in Richard Strauss in chapter 1, and in Bartók in chapter 7 (but also, incipiently, in early Webern in chapter 6):

A   A

B♯   G♭

B   G

C   F♭

C♭   F

D   E

E♯   E♯

E   D

F   C♭

F♭   C

G   B

G♭   B♭

Any Bb in one hand will be paired with a G♯ in the other, B with G, and so on. Not only the As at the axis, but every pitch is assigned a specific "hypostatized" register in this composition such as we have already observed in some of Stravinsky's earlier music, radiating out from the axis (see Ex. 12-24a). The only consistent exception to this rule is the note E♭, which appears in three different registers. E♭, of course, is the tritone-antipode of A, and the only other note that pairs with itself in the array shown above. Precisely for that reason Webern went out of his way to minimize its role in the movement. In m. 6 it occurs in both hands (in octaves) as a grace note to a main note played *fortissimo*. That is one way of sweeping it under the rug. The other way is to make it the last pitch of the first pair of row forms and the first pitch of the second; in this way the single grace note can do double duty in the row-count, and thus appear only once in the whole first section.

ex. 12-26 Anton Webern, Variations for Piano, Op. 27, II

In the second half, the E♭ appears twice. In m. 21 it does what it did in m. 6; in m. 15, it appears as part of a three-note chord, where its own specific identity is muted by the overriding harmonic color (as usual, an "atonal triad"; in fact, all the three-note chords in this movement, as in the first, are drawn from order positions 6–8, so that the atonal triad is the only chord that appears). The systematic minimizing of E♭ leaves A as the perceptually undisputed tone center of the movement. We could not have a better illustration of the way in which the twelve-tone system was seen by its early practitioners not as a way of excluding pitch hierarchies (or "tonal" references), but as a way of asserting them in new, context-specific ways.

The third movement is the most straightforwardly composed of the three, and the most conventionally laid out as a set of variations. It consists of a theme and five variations, set off from one another by tempo and texture. The theme (Ex. 12-27), consisting of R₄, RI₄, and P₄ laid end to end, sums up within itself the inverse and reverse symmetries of the preceding two movements; its middle part is a contour-mirror of the first, and the last is the first reversed. Not by accident, the starting (and hence the finishing) note is E♭, the suppressed

tritone complement from the preceding movement, now given its complementary place in the sun.

ex. 12-27 Anton Webern, Variations for Piano, Op. 27, III, mm. 1–12

It is with reference to this movement, and particularly to the theme, that the stems and beams have been added to the usual note-heads in the row as given in Ex. 12-24a, for it is here that the row is partitioned most rigorously into its constituent semitones, presented always in inverted or compound form (that is, as sevenths or ninths). The very beginning of the theme, which uses the reversed row, shows most clearly the way the two semitones in order positions 9–12 (grouped 9/12 + 10/11) are associated (or, if one prefers, differentiated) by means of texture and articulation: the outer pair are long and detached, the inner pair short and legato. In m. 3 the two semitone pairs that occupy order positions 3–6 (3/5 + 4/6) are similarly associated. For the rest, the variations consist of additional studies in inverse and reverse symmetry, using the restricted harmonic vocabulary with which we have become familiar: single notes, sevenths and ninths, and "atonal triads." Only the last variation (Ex. 12-28) introduces a new chord: /0 3 4/, sometimes called the "double-inflected third" since it combines /0 3/ (a minor third) with /0 4/ (a major third).

ex. 12-28 Anton Webern, Variations for Piano, Op. 27, III, mm. 56–end

As a succession, these intervals are found in two places in the row: order positions 1–3 and 9–11. Webern seizes the opportunity this coincidence offers for constructing symmetries. Since 1–3 can do double duty as the beginning of a prime or end of a retrograde, Webern begins with the latter, R₄ (the row form with which the theme had originally begun), and follows it with P₄ (with which the theme had originally ended), allowing the first right-hand chord in m. 58 (AFG♯) to serve as fulcrum for a pitch palindrome such as formed the substance of the first movement.

Another pitch palindrome begins at the upbeat to m. 60. This time, Webern chooses to begin with a transposition of the retrograde-inversion, RI₅, that allows the two /0 3 4/ trichords to exchange places and functions when followed by the similarly pitched inversion, I₅. The E♭ that closes I₅ in m. 64 does double duty as the first note of RI₆, with which the variation, and the Variations, come to an end. Beginning with that E♭ in m. 64, then, the last three measures of the piece are, in effect, mm. 60–61 transposed down a "cadential" semitone. More importantly, the transposition allows the Variations to end with A, the pitch center of the second movement and the tritone complement of E♭, in the melodically exposed top voice.

Notes:

(39) Anton von Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, trans. Leo Black (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1963), p. 54.

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Canon: After 1900

EPITOME

Chapter: CHAPTER 12 In Search of Utopia
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Even more economical are the Webern compositions in which the row itself is so contrived as to do "double duty," reducing the number of independent row forms and multiplying the field of potential relationships among them. In the two-movement Symphony, op. 21 (1928), the second hexachord is the first reversed at the tritone, as tracing them from the middle out to the ends will quickly show. But this means that the entire row is an intervallic palindrome: its retrograde form is the same as the prime transposed by a tritone, so that $P_0 = R_6$ and $R_0 = P_6$. This eliminates the retrograde as an independent row form, leaving only twelve possible primes and twelve possible inversions (= retrograde inversions).

With the row its own retrograde, and with inversion therefore the only meaningful transformation of it, the Symphony became inevitably ("by nature") what the Piano Variations were by artful design: a study in tightly controlled multidimensional symmetry. That seems in fact to be what Webern meant by calling the work a symphony. There is little or nothing in its formal procedures to compare with those of the traditional symphony; but the texture, as we are about to discover it, is maximally "harmonious" or "sym-phonic" in the etymological sense (well known to antiquarian musicologists) that everything in it fits ideally with everything else.

The first movement of the Symphony consists of three elaborately worked out double canons that pit two prime forms against two inversions. The three canons are presented in a binary form in which the first repeated part consists of the first canon (mm. 1–26), and the second contains the other two (mm. 25–44, 43–66). This may in fact have been a "neoclassical" reference to the traditional first-movement form, in which the section up to the first double bar was the exposition, while the section up to the second double bar contained both a development and a recapitulation.

By constructing canons by inversion on a self-reversing row, Webern assures a constant multidimensional intervallic symmetry throughout the movement, combining the palindrome effect from the first movement of his Piano Variations with the invariant harmonic axis of the second (again located on A, the starting note of P_0). The first canon by inversion (Ex. 12-29) begins in the horns at the unison: the second player enters first with P_0 (=R_6) and the first answers with I_0 (=RI_6). After the first four pitches have been sounded, the *dux* or leading voice moves to the clarinet for the next four and the cello for the last four, while the *comes* or following voice moves to the bass clarinet for the next four and the viola for the last four. The second canon shadows the first at the major third, both below (I_8) and above (P_4). Both of these row forms begin in the harp, I_8 in m. 2 (continuing in the cello) and P_4 in m. 4 (continuing in the viola).

ex. 12-29 Anton Webern, Symphony, Op. 21, I, mm. 1–25

The fact that both canons begin with similar tone colors but then shift to others, and the fact that some of the same colors are used in both canons, suggests that Webern was not interested in having his canons perceived by the listener as coherent lines. Instead, they are absorbed into a kaleidoscopically fragmented texture that has often been compared with the painterly technique known as pointillism, in which solid objects are rendered as multitudes of individual daubs and dots of pigment, and become unrecognizable when viewed up close.

It may not be the best analogy for Webern's fragmentation technique, since there is no standpoint from which the linear coherence of his canons becomes salient. But that is not surprising. As we have long since observed, a canon as such is of no particular interest (and shows no particular skill on the part of the composer) once dissonance has been "emancipated." Webern has simply relied on the device in order to generate a profusion of symmetrically related intervals that can be mined for motivic connections. It was the patterning of these smaller units—as a means for achieving what Webern called "the greatest possible unity in music," and "the utmost relatedness between all component parts"[40] —that provided the point and

purpose of this or any twelve-tone composition. That is what we need, however briefly, to investigate.

The reason the beginnings and ends of the three canons—mm. 1–26, 25–44, 43–66—overlap by a measure is that throughout the movement Webern proceeds from row form to row form by a sort of punning process that the structure of the row was designed to make possible. The C and E♭ in the cello in mm. 11–12, for example, are at once the last two pitches of P_0 and the first two in I_3, while the F♯ and E♭ in the viola in mm. 13–14 are simultaneously the last two pitches in I_0 and the first two in P_9. (Note, by the way, that the new row forms are now shadowing P_0 at the minor third, another potential axis of harmonic symmetry.) But these correspondences are only the beginning. As Ex. 12-24b shows, four dyads in I_3 have exact counterparts in P_0 (and so will all the other P/I pairs at a transposition of a minor third in either direction). And as the same example also shows, any P/I pair at the unison will also have four dyads (two the same, two different) in common.

And that is why Webern so elaborately fixed (or "hypostatized") the relationships between pitch and register and between pitch and rhythm in this movement. For the duration of the first canon, pitches are assigned registers strictly according to the symmetrical distribution shown in Ex. 12-24b, which is derived from the ordinary axis of symmetry around A by transforming the chromatic scale (or "circle of minor seconds") into a circle of fifths (here represented, by inversion, as fourths). Only E♭, the antipode to A, appears in two registers (and in the actual music, always in harmony with A: see the harp in mm. 7 and 9, the viola in m. 19, the cello in m. 21). All the other pitches appear in one register only.

Comparing the actual music now with the abstract representation of the row forms in Ex. 12-24b, we find the paired dyads expressed as actual recurring motives: the GA♭ in the horn in mm. 3–4 (from P_0) is answered in the bass clarinet in mm. 9–10 (from I_0), using the exact same pitch placement and rhythm: similarly the BB♭ in the first horn in mm. 5–6 (from P_0) and in the clarinet in mm. 7–8 (from I_0), the DC♯ in the bass clarinet in m. 8 (from I_0), in the cello in m. 10 (from P_O), and again in the cello in m. 13 (from I_3). And so it goes throughout the movement.

In the second double canon, all of these conditions continue to hold (although the particular pitch-register distribution changes somewhat), and in addition, the two canons use the identical sequence of rhythms. These reverse midway, like the rhythms in the first movement of the Piano Variations but on a much larger scale, so that the whole section from m. 25 to m. 44 (Ex. 12-30) is a pitch-rhythm palindrome that reverses around the downbeat of m. 35. Another way of putting it would be to say that mm. 35–44 are a literal retrograde of mm. 25–34.

It has been claimed, on the basis of movements like this, that (unlike Schoenberg and Berg) Webern sought what Milton Babbitt once described as "a completely autonomous conception of the twelve-tone system," in which all components of a composition "would be determined by the relations and operations of the system."[41] But while Webern was obviously more concerned than his colleagues were to systematize all the details of his works, and while he achieved a sometimes astoundingly thorough organization of their textures, his conception of twelve-tone music was not completely "autonomous," if by that one means completely independent of traditional criteria of "tonal" coherence.

ex. 12-30 Anton Webern, Symphony, Op. 21, I, mm. 27–42 (the pitch-rhythm palindrome minus the ends, which overlap with other material)

The pitch-register distribution in the first canon, for example, with its ascending fourths in the bass, could not have been selected without awareness of the "tonal" properties of such progressions. Indeed, Webern seems to have gone out of his way to emphasize them by the frequent placement of the low Ds and Gs in strong metrical positions: for example, in the bass clarinet (mm. 8–9), the cello and harp in mm. 13–14 (the harp's low G not only metrically strong but unaccompanied), or even at the very outset, where the second horn's repeated F♯ in m. 2 acts as an upbeat (ineluctably suggesting the leading-tone function) to the strongly placed G in m. 3.

This residual or reflexive bond with "tonal" tradition was a facet of the early twelve-tone composers' high consciousness of their role, within their idiosyncratic conception of music history, as custodians of a great tradition who kept faith with it by maintaining it in a state of incessant stylistic and technical evolution. The "progressive" and the "traditional" were thus held in a conceptual or "dialectical" balance that made it possible for the Viennese dodecaphonists to disdain with equal fervor both those who (in the name of conventional standards of beauty) resisted the progress that atonality exemplified and those who (in the name of primitivism or in that of radical politics) denigrated tradition.

We have seen Schoenberg declare his loyalty to that tradition, and also assert leadership within it, by quoting the B-A-C-H cipher in his Variations for Orchestra, op. 31 (1928). Ten years later, Webern brought that assertion to a characteristic climax in his String Quartet, op. 28, by basing the entire composition on a row consisting of three statements of the cipher, which thus became its all-pervasive *Grundgestalt* (Ex. 12-24c). The first and last statements are related by simple transposition both to the original BACH cipher and to each other. The middle tetrachord employs a version that could be described either as the inversion of the cipher or as the retrograde, since the cipher happens to be structured in such a way that the two forms coincide. And therefore the row constructed from it will also have remarkably "redundant" properties of a

kind that, as we already know, Webern loved to exploit.

The BACH tetrachords that make up the row have been ingeniously chosen so that the two halves of the row—that is, its hexachords—reproduce one another by inversion if one proceeds from the middle out to the ends. The interval separating them at the midpoint is a minor third. Thus the entire row is its own retrograde inversion, a minor third "up" (and its retrograde is its own inversion by a complementary transposition of a minor third "down"). But at the same time the first and last tetrachords stand a major third apart, so that row forms at that transposition will overlap by an entire tetrachord. The implications of this unique feature are shown in Ex. 12-24c, where the three versions of P(=RI) and the three versions of R(=I) that may be related by transpositions of a major third are shown to break down into a fund of only three constituent tetrachords, each of which occurs in two orderings. That is the material out of which the first movement of the quartet is constructed.

In a lecture that he gave in March 1932, Webern exulted in the tightness of structure he had achieved in his Symphony thanks to the palindromic row on which it had been based: "Greater unity is impossible. Even the Netherlanders didn't manage it."[42] But in the Quartet he did manage to exceed it, and in the first movement he went even further in limiting his material to recurrent motives by hypostatizing not only the registers in which pitches could occur, but also the instruments to which they were assigned. The first section of the movement (Ex. 12-31) uses the scheme shown in Ex. 12-24c, in which the first violin plays only two pitches, a′ and g♯″; the second violin only b♭, d♭ and c′; the viola only g, e, f′, and f♯′; and the cello only b, e♭, and d′.

Webern's Quartet thus epitomizes the Janus-faced aspect of early twelve-tone music. It goes further than any other composition of its time in the tightly organized direction that Webern and his colleagues identified as progress—that is, the inevitable fate of music as mandated by its history—at the same time that it asserts, in every single note, its claim of lineal descent from Bach (or from the "Netherlanders"), from whom that history was traced. And yet it was another, slightly earlier composition of Webern's from the same period that would have the greatest influence of all on the later development of twelve-tone music, although no one at the time foresaw it.

Webern worked on his seven-minute Concerto, op. 24, for nine instruments (flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, trumpet, trombone, violin, viola, and piano) over a three-year period, from 1931 to 1934. Ex. 12-24d shows its row, perhaps the most famous individual tone row ever devised, and Fig. 12-5 shows a sketch page, dating from February 1931, on which Webern worked toward fashioning it. At the end of the first day's work (4 February), at the beginning of the seventh staff, Webern entered what looks something like a tritone transposition of the row he finally adopted: F E G♯ A C C♯ D B♭ B G G♭ E♭. The next day he made two minute adjustments, exchanging the positions of the CC♯ and GG♭ pairs, and then he had it: a row that could be divided into four trichords that would sum up among them all the standard "operations" of the twelve-tone technique.

ex. 12-31 Anton Webern, String Quartet, Op. 28, I, mm. 1–15

fig. 12-5 Webern, sketch for the first movement of *Concerto*, op. 24.

Labeling the trichords *a, b, c,* and *d*, and using the German abbreviations U (for *Umkehr*, inversion), Kr (for *Krebs*, "crabwise" or retrograde), and Ukr (for *umgekehrter Krebs*, or inverted retrograde), Webern noted with schoolmasterly meticulousness that *a* was the Ukr of b, the Kr of c, and the U of d; that *b* was the Ukr of a, the U of *c*, and the Kr of d; that *c* was the U of b, the Kr of a, and the Ukr of d; and that *d* was the Ukr of c, the Kr of b, and the U of a. Next he wrote out the retrograde form of the whole row, and noted its corollary property: that applying the four operations to the whole row reproduced the four trichords in a different order and at a uniform transposition (in this case, a tritone). Restoring the original order of the constituent trichords at the pitch of the retrograde produced the row form with which the composition would eventually start, and which is therefore now regarded as the prime form.

The strange inscription entered twice beneath these musical sketches—"Sator Arepo tenet opera rotas"—is a famous Latin palindrome that had served as Webern's inspiration in deriving his row from a single trichord. Near-gibberish, it may be translated into English in a number of equally cryptic ways: "The sower Arepo holds the works of his hoe," and "The sower Arepo keeps the work circling" are among the translations that have been proposed. But its meaning is altogether secondary to its "structure": for it is more than a palindrome. When arranged as a square, thus—

S A T O R

A R E P O

T E N E T

O P E R A

R O T A S

—its five five-letter words can be read from left to right starting at the top, from right to left starting at the bottom, down the columns starting at the left, or up the columns starting at the right, producing a very suggestive analogy, made explicit in Ex. 12-24e, to the U, Kr, and Ukr trichords and the way they reconstitute themselves in various permutations of the row.

As might easily be inferred simply from knowing the properties of the row, the music of the Concerto (so called, evidently, on the basis of the way in which the piano interacts with the instrumental group) is a kaleidoscope of trichords, all of which have the identical intervallic shape of the *Grundgestalt*: a semitone and a major third, with "circumflex" contour, or a chord (like the ones near the end of the Piano Variations) with a double-inflected third. The first five measures (Ex. 12-32) are a paradigm: the oboe, flute, trumpet, and clarinet give the four trichords of the prime form, their contrasting tone colors and implied speeds (in a ratio of 8:4:6:3) giving the contrapuntal texture maximum clarity. Then the piano, with its uniform tone color, plays the row's retrograde inversion with the rhythm reversed and at the transposition of a minor third, which reproduces the pitch contents of the trichords in their original order of succession but with their internal pitch orders reversed.

It is notoriously easy to overestimate the complexity of this music. Both its highly rationalized compositional (or "precompositional") methods, and the immense sum total of motivic relationships to which nearly everything else is sacrificed, lend themselves to exhaustive verbal or graphic description that, like any other kind of detail-heavy programmatic paraphrase, can all too readily replace the sound-object so described as focus of attention. But the sound-object as such is neither dense nor arcane. Webern's textures are famously spare and transparent, and in terms of events-per-unit-time, his music is far less heavily laden than Schoenberg's—or, especially, Berg's, whose music has always been regarded by audiences as far more "accessible." It is the description, not the music, that boggles the mind. The music lays everything bare. The description all too easily covers it up again. And that may be because the description is usually cast entirely in "poietic" terms—in terms, that is, of the relationship between the music and its maker—or else in what is sometimes called "neutral" terms (in terms, that is, of an "objective" inventory of its "purely musical" content). As there has already been occasion to observe, the "esthesic" aspect—the relationship between the music and its audience, or the impact the composer seeks to make on a hearer—is rarely addressed.

ex. 12-32 Anton Webern, Concerto, Op. 24, I, mm. 1–5

In part this has been a deliberate strategy. Surrounding modernist art with a cult of difficulty has been a trusty protective measure, keeping the hostile crowd at bay. As the hostility of the crowd became more and more overtly political, in the context, first, of "Weimar culture" (not limited, of course, to Weimar or even to Germany) and later in that of the totalitarian Nazi state, which threatened and eventually swallowed up Webern's Austrian homeland, resistance of this kind was hardened. Webern himself tended to cast the difficulty of his art in heroic terms, as a bulwark of embattled high culture. "It's nonsense to advance 'social objections'" to the difficulty of the new music, Webern told a lecture audience in 1932, when most of the opposition came from the political left. "Why don't people understand that? Our push forward *had* to be made, it was a push forward such as never was before. In fact we have to break new ground with each work: each work is something different, something new.... How do people hope to follow this? Obviously it's very difficult."[43] But in private correspondence, and in one exceptional case in an article meant for publication (but unpublished until 1978), Webern described his music "esthesically"—and with enormous emotional excitement—in terms of the impact his achievements had on himself as an ideally informed listener. The article, significantly enough, concerned the String Quartet and its total governance by the BACH cipher. It had been commissioned in 1939 by Erwin Stein (1885–1958), a close friend of Webern's and a fellow former pupil of Schoenberg, who had been forced to emigrate to England as a result of the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938. Stein had become a music editor for the London firm of Boosey and Hawkes, which had agreed to publish the Quartet. He commissioned an analysis from Webern to appear in *Tempo*, the firm's house organ. Webern sent it off for translation during the summer. But the publication both of the Quartet and of the analysis were thwarted by the outbreak of the Second World War in September, which made commerce, or even correspondence, between London and Vienna impossible.

From this article, which runs about 2,500 words, three selected paragraphs will suffice to give the extravagantly hyperbolic flavor. The first concerns the structure of the third movement, which Webern describes as a synthesis of two "classical" or academic forms that are usually deemed incompatible.

> Formwise, this structure is but a *periodic scherzo subject* in the shape of the third exposition of a *double fugue*; that is to say (with reference to my fugue subject which begins in the development of the Scherzo): a stretto of "subject" and "countersubject." As far as I know, this had *never* been done before; as a double canon *in retrograde, moreover*, it had never been done at all!!! Therefore, does this not justifiably constitute also the third exposition of a double fugue? And to repeat it once more, it is yet but nothing other than a period, in compliance with the principles of construction of a *scherzo subject*, as in Beethoven. Thus, it obeys the laws of *horizontal* construction. But as the stretto, the third exposition of a double fugue, at the same time it is also in compliance with the principles of *vertical* construction, as in Bach. Now then, is this or is this not a synthesis of the two styles?[44]

A little later, Webern reveals the intimate relationship between his success in fashioning an unprecedented canon in retrograde and the structure—but not only the structure!—of his row:

> The question could be raised how this is possible, I mean the canon just described: one pair of voices has Notes 5–12 and the other pair Notes 1–8. And is a strict canon among all four parts possible in spite of this? Well, now I must finally reveal how the "row" is constructed; this is, indeed, one of the most important concerns in this Quartet, perhaps the most fundamental one! You see, the second four notes of the row fashion their *intervals* from the *retrograde* of the first four, and the last four notes relate to the second four in the same way. But this means that the entire Quartet is based on nothing else than this specific *succession of four pitches*! Now it so happens that the first four notes of the "original" form of the row, transposed to B♭, yield the four letters BACH. Thus, my fugue subject presents this name three times (with the subject's three motives of four notes each making up the 12 notes of the row), but only *secretly* because, on the other hand, the original form NEVER occurs in this ostentatious transposition!!! All the same though, the *four notes* do underlie the *entire Quartet*!![45]

And here is the conclusion:

> Perhaps one could ask: what does the fugue subject "really" have in common with the scherzo subject, so that the reprise of the latter can also function as the third exposition of the fugue? Answer: in both cases the 12 notes of the row; that is, what rules here is altogether the MOST FAR REACHING RELATIONSHIP which can exist between two forms: they are *identical*!!! In both cases, moreover, the grouping of 3 × 4 notes; for it is also present in the subject of the Scherzo, even if it is not so conspicuous there. But it is there—and this I still would like to say in closing—, even reaching as far as it does in the row itself. Namely, as each successive four notes in the row constitute the *retrograde* of the preceding four, so is such a relationship given also in the scherzo subject's *rhythmic structure* from four-note group to four-note group, even if it does not become so clearly visible there because of the variations. For such a relationship within the row must also carry an *obligation* for everything else that follows!! And with this I am saying that the subject is based not only on a group of FOUR PITCHES, but also on their rhythmic configuration![46]

The italics, the capitals, the double and triple exclamation points (all of which would surely have been edited out for publication in English) convey tremendous pride in authorship, of course; and there is also the specific combination of satisfaction in the achievement of structural consistency and triumph at its concealment from the uninitiated that was so typical of elitist modernism, and that reached its peak in the literature dealing with twelve-tone music. There is also the familiar joy in synthesizing the two great Bs—something that goes back at least as far as the "third B," Brahms, and constitutes the composer's claim to a place in an anointed line of succession.

What there is not is the thing one always finds in Berg: the assurance that the elaborate compositional means were a conduit to a cathartic emotional payoff. Webern's esthetic had become as "dehumanized" and impersonal as Stravinsky's. The joy he sought (and sought to convey) was the joy of wondrous contemplation. After the experience of Webern's sparse and attenuated sound-patterns one is not surprised

to learn that his great passion outside of music was mountain climbing. If Schoenberg's expressionist music proffered a whiff of "air from another planet," Webern's rarefied twelve-tone compositions exuded the atmosphere of a solitary Alpine peak.

But there is something else as well in Webern's exuberant description of his creative produce—something that goes beyond esthetics into the domain of ethics—in all the talk of constraint, obedience, compliance, and obligation. We have circled back to the veneration for the Law with which we started (with Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* as our example); and it is hard not to connect Webern's artistic vision, in the context of the turbulent 1930s, with the Utopian or Arcadian (futuristic or nostalgic) cravings that dominated European social and political thought. Like Stravinsky's contemporaneous parables of submission, Webern's musical Utopias, the most orderly and disciplined worlds of music ever to have been conceived and realized by that time, seem in their tidy beauty of conception and their ruthlessly exacting realization to broach a theme that was on the mind of every artist then alive: the theme—ominous to some, inspiring to others—of art and totalitarianism.

Notes:

(40) "The Path to Twelve-Note Composition," in Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, ed. Willi Reich, trans. Leo Black (Bryn Mawr, Pa.: Theodore Presser Co., 1963), p. 42.

(41) Milton Babbitt, "Some Aspects of Twelve-Tone Composition," *The Score*, no. 12 (June 1955), p. 53.

(42) Webern, *The Path to the New Music*, p. 56.

(43) *Ibid.*, p. 45.

(44) Anton von Webern, "Analysis of the String Quartet, op. 28," trans. Zoltan Roman, in Hans Moldenhauer and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 754.

(45) *Ibid.*, pp. 755–56.

(46) *Ibid.*, p. 756.

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CHAPTER 13 Music and Totalitarian Society

Casella and Respighi (Fascist Italy); Orff, Hindemith, Hartmann (Nazi Germany); Prokofieff and Shostakovich (Soviet Russia)

Chapter: CHAPTER 13 Music and Totalitarian Society
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

MASS POLITICS

It is as though mankind had divided itself between those who believe in human omnipotence (who think that everything is possible if one knows how to organize masses for it) and those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives.[1]

— Hannah Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism

Is it conceivable that certain historico-political conditions can have a profound and beneficial influence on art? Does it make any sense whatsoever to expect an artistic rebirth to come from a political rebirth? Can the work of a man of politics, however exceptional, influence that most intimate, personal and jealously guarded thing which is artistic creation?

Counter to every Romantic prejudice, our answer to this question is yes.[2]

— Alessandro Pavolini, *Critica Fascista* (1 November 1926)

fig. 13-1 Russia, the February Revolution: wives of soldiers and sailors marching on the Duma (parliament).

With the destruction of the great imperial states of Europe, the great political question was what kind of state should replace them. The question was answered in Russia even before the end of the Great War, when the Bolshevik (Communist) party, led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924), took power, in a coup d'état engineered on 25 October 1917, from the so-called Provisional Government that had been set up by liberal politicians, many of them noblemen, after the Russian revolution in February of that year, which had forced the abdication of the tsar. (The date of Lenin's coup is given here according to the "Old Style" or Julian calendar, then still used in Russia, which had long since been replaced in the rest of Europe and America by the "New Style" or Gregorian calendar, according to which the date of the coup was 7 November; the new Russian government adopted the New Style in 1918, but continued to celebrate its coming to power as the "October Revolution," even though the celebrations now took place in November.) The government that emerged from the coup called itself the government of Soviets, after the Russian word for council, the nominal seat of power under the new regime. In 1922, after the victorious conclusion of a civil war through which the Soviet government was able to reconsolidate under its rule most of the territory of the former Russian Empire, the name of the country was changed to Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union for short). The Soviet Union lasted until 1991, when the power of the Communist Party collapsed and the country fell apart into its constituent republics, which then adopted various forms of government. Its hold of seventy-plus years made the Soviet Union the twentieth century's most durable totalitarian state.

Totalitarianism is the concentration of total political power into the hands of a ruling elite, in the most extreme case into the hands of a single person, who exercises that power in the name of a totalized, all-encompassing worldview or ideology that gives government a totalizing purpose: the achievement of a "total and perfected"[3] social order (to quote Massimo Bontempelli, a theorist of Italian fascism) through the imposition of direct state control in all areas of public and even private life; the total solution of economic problems; the total "reeducation" of citizens to erase the distinction between the political and any other potentially competing source of power (such as religious authority or the "romantic" concept of inherent human rights), the total mobilization of the population in a single plan of action (enforced by coercion and, if necessary, by terror), and often the total domination of the totalitarian state's weaker neighbors.

It is a term (coined in 1925 by Giovanni Gentile, an Italian philosopher)—and a definition—that has arisen out of the twentieth century's historical experience. There were coercive regimes in the past, to be sure, and many of the coercive techniques employed by the modern totalitarian states, such as the use of terror tactics and professional informers ("secret police"), had precedents in revolutionary France and later in the post-Napoleonic reaction. The term totalitarian is reserved for regimes that, having the use of modern surveillance technology and mass media, were able to operate on a far grander (more "totalizing") scale than their predecessors. The three great totalitarian powers that arose in postwar Europe, of which the Soviet Union was the first, often touted themselves as the world's only truly modern states, a claim that was based on their power to manipulate and mobilize mass psychology through propaganda. Thus totalitarianism thrived on "mass politics," rabble-rousing writ large.

The Soviet form of totalitarianism was, or purported to be, the realization of a social vision put forth by the political economist Karl Marx (1818–83) in a number of treatises, culminating in the massive *Das Kapital* ("Capital"), issued in three volumes (two of them posthumous) between 1867 and 1895. Marx's purportedly scientific analysis of capitalism, the entrepreneurial system through which the advanced societies of Europe and America had amassed their wealth, had concluded with a prediction that its built-in contradictions must engender a revolt from below that would put political and economic power in the hands of the social classes who actually produced the wealth that capitalists exploited for the sake of their own selfish enrichment.

An earlier document, *The Communist Manifesto*, which Marx and Friedrich Engels, another German economic theorist, issued in the great revolutionary year 1848, had ended with a prediction that ultimate revolutionary success would be enjoyed not by the bourgeois politicians who were leading the political disturbances that year, but by the urban workers who thus far had lacked the organization that would allow them to mobilize their collective strength. "Working men of all countries, unite!" the *Manifesto* ended; "You have nothing to lose but your chains." The outcome of proletarian revolution, Marx and Engels prophesied, would be a "classless" society—a perfected and homogenized democracy toward which the whole history of mankind had been striving, a utopia that would make all existing states and nations obsolete.

Marx and Engels, who had to flee to England after the revolutions in which they had participated were crushed, never dreamed that Russia would be the first country to witness a communist revolution such as they had predicted. Their doctrine assumed that the world revolution would begin in the countries where capitalist development had proceeded furthest, and where there was consequently a large urban "proletariat" or working class. Russia was economically backward and largely agrarian; indeed, not until 1861 were the laws of serfdom, the last official remains of feudalism, legally abolished in Russia. And by no stretch of the imagination (except the stretch of imagination that became mandatory in the Soviet Union) could the Leninist coup be called a mass revolution from below such as Marx and Engels had foreseen.

Instead, the Soviet Union was a country in which a communist revolution was decreed, from above, by an oligarchy that wielded total power in the name of "the masses"—the proletariat and the peasantry—and with the promise, never kept, that power would eventually pass into the hands of those whom Marx had envisioned as the actual revolutionary agents. The nominal source of Soviet political ideology in Marxism enabled the Soviet government to claim, all contradictions notwithstanding, that it was acting in accordance with Marx's "Hegelian" philosophy of historical necessity (a notion we have already seen applied to the history of music).

In the turmoil that followed the Great War, there was a great deal of communist agitation in the countries that emerged out of the defeated empires of Austria and Germany. The Soviet Communists were briefly successful, in fact, in exporting their brand of revolution abroad. "Soviet republics" were set up in 1919 through coups d'état in the Southern German state of Bavaria and in Hungary. Both were suppressed by bloody military interventions: in Bavaria by the German army, and in Hungary by a counterrevolutionary force led by Admiral Nicholas Horthy, who had been the commander of the Austro-Hungarian naval fleet during the Great War. The Bavarian state was reincorporated into the so-called Weimar Republic, a short-lived experiment in democracy that lasted until 1933, while Horthy proclaimed the reinstatement of the old kingdom of Hungary—which, however, he continued to rule as autocratic regent rather than allowing the return of the crown to the former Austrian emperor (thus the new, and land-locked, Hungarian state

became a totalitarian but anti-Communist kingdom without a king, ruled by an admiral without a navy).

Faced with totalitarian threats from the Soviet Union (which, following Marx, declared "world revolution" to be its goal), racked by internal political agitation, and beset by economic chaos, the fledgling democracies of Central Europe were insecure and unstable. There was considerable sentiment everywhere that revolution could only be resisted by counterrevolution, or by a preemptive counter-totalitarianism to resist the spread of Soviet power. The looming presence of the Soviet Union on the world scene was thus among the factors that brought the other totalitarian regimes to power.

The first country in which such a counter-totalitarian regime was established turned out to be Italy, where a semi-legal political organization called the *Partito Nazionàle Fascista*, led by Benito Mussolini (1883–1945), seized power in a coup d'état (preceded by a dramatic "march on Rome") on 29 October 1922. Fascism began as a doctrine of nationalist resistance to revolutionary internationalism ("world revolution"). It took its name from the *fasces* (bundles), tightly wound gatherings of wooden rods from which axe heads projected, that were carried by imperial guards to symbolize unity and power in ancient Rome. Fascism upheld the role of elites in political leadership, and the ideal of social hierarchy.

Fascist society was to be ordered by syndicates, groups representing economic and social roles (skills, trades, professions), with ultimate political power residing in the managerial syndicate, which alone represented the interests of the society as a whole, or what was called the "corporate state." As in the case of Russian Communism, Italian Fascism ultimately devolved in practice into an autocratic dictatorship propped up by an enormous bureaucracy. The difference was that Fascist authoritarian power did not challenge or deny the right of individual enterprise, but sought instead to discipline or co-opt it. Its core constituency, in sharp contrast to Soviet power, was the bourgeoisie. Where Soviet Communism (or "Bolshevism") could be simplistically described as the use of directed force and violence to overthrow established hierarchies, Italian Fascism could be (just as simplistically) described as the use of directed force and violence to maintain them.

During the first decade of its existence, Italian Fascism was widely admired from afar. "Mussolini has made the trains run on time," ran the familiar refrain. His admirers in the 1920s included some leading politicians in the democratic governments of western Europe and America. Even Winston Churchill, who as prime minister of the United Kingdom would eventually lead his nation in war against Mussolini, had warm words for him in the twenties. And he was downright popular among artists, particularly elite modernists who felt threatened by the empowerment of the uneducated working class.

Stravinsky, an uprooted Russian nobleman who had been personally impoverished as a consequence of the Bolshevik coup, was particularly vociferous in his praise of Mussolini, called *Il Duce* ("The Leader") by his followers. In 1931, Stravinsky allowed himself to be described in print by one of his spokesmen as "the dictator of the reaction against the anarchy into which modernism has degenerated."[4] Thus the "neoclassical" Stravinsky had consciously cast himself as the Mussolini of music, who wanted to do for modern music what the Duce promised to do for modern Europe. Nor was Stravinsky the only composer to draw an explicit connection, in the twenties, between the ideals of neoclassicism and those of Fascism. Alfredo Casella (1883–1947), an Italian composer educated in France and a great admirer of both Mussolini and Stravinsky, wrote of the "close affinity between the beneficial if sometimes chimerical objectives pursued by 'Mussolinism,' and the goal of intellectual restoration sought by the best Italians of the present day."[5] Both Fascism and the new currents in music, Casella wrote, were "movements full of audacity and life," which together were bringing about a national reawakening. He compared his country and its political renewal with "a young composer" of his acquaintance, "who, formerly involved, muddled and postromantic, has suddenly turned classical: that is to say, concerned with imitating Frescobaldi."[6] Invoking the name of Italy's great seventeenth-century organist, Casella was describing the Italian equivalent of the Franco-German "back to Bach" movement, but even better because, evoking a "still more remote past," it was more truly classical.

"Classicism is the natural form of Italian thought," Casella declared, "inherited directly from the Greeks, through Rome"[7] —the glorious Rome that Mussolini was reviving. "And this modern classicism," he went on, "far from being an artificial thing" like that of some composers he could name, "is with us an enforced result

of language, tradition and daily contemplation of nature." That was why Italian neoclassicism, a "deep and fertile love of the past that now stirs young Italian musicians," had nothing in common with those "famous 'returns' to other geniuses with which Paris (and Berlin too) have so heaped us during the last years,"[8] for these were but the flabby goods of flabby and indolent democracies that lacked a glorious classical past of their own on which to draw.

What changed everything, ending the romance of Fascism forever, was Mussolini's eventual alliance with Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), his counterpart in Germany, who came to power in 1933 with a platform of barefaced racial intolerance; who practiced repressions and betrayals that rivaled and in some ways even exceeded those of the Soviet government, on which (many think) they were covertly modeled; whose insatiable territorial aggression led to the outbreak of the Second World War, the bloodiest military conflict in history; and who eventually committed the century's most horrendous acts of politically rationalized and legalized mass murder.

What brought Hitler and his National Socialist (Nazi) Party to power was, once again, the threat of Soviet-style subversion. As we already know from its potent propaganda impact on the arts, and especially on opera and music theater (see Chapter 9), the German Communist Party had become very strong during the latter phases of the democratic Weimar Republic, which led many to mistrust democracy as a safeguard of their interests. It was his party's strong showing in the free parliamentary elections of 1932 that led to Hitler's being appointed Reichskanzler (Chancellor), the equivalent of prime minister, by Paul von Hindenburg, the last president of the Weimar Republic.

By the end of the next year, Hitler had done away with the democratic institutions that had allowed his rise to power and had begun the systematic persecutions, not only of political opponents but of minority groups such as Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and the mentally retarded. Nazi fury was especially vehement toward the Jews, who unlike the other targeted minorities had been politically active, culturally prominent, and therefore disproportionately powerful in the democratic republic, and who were easy scapegoats for the adverse economic conditions that led to the political unrest for which Hitler had promised a remedy. By the end of 1933, both Arnold Schoenberg and Kurt Weill, composers who had virtually nothing in common except their Jewish heritage, had fled Germany for their lives. (It is a measure of the then-perceived differences between totalitarian states that in retrospect seem kin that Schoenberg, who eventually went to the United States by way of France and Spain, first considered seeking refuge in the Soviet Union.) The Fascist and Nazi regimes lasted only until the end of the war Hitler had provoked and lost. The Soviet Union, though briefly Hitler's ally, had ended up on the other side of that conflict as a result of Hitler's betrayal. The wartime ally of the United States, Great Britain, and France, the Soviet Union emerged from the war badly scarred (since its territory had seen much of the worst fighting) but politically much strengthened. It almost immediately became the rival "superpower" to the United States. The period of international tension thus initiated, which lasted from about 1948 until the Soviet collapse some forty years later, was known as the Cold War. Its repercussions in music are a story in itself; for now we will consider music in the totalitarian countries chiefly in their "interwar" heyday.

Notes:

(1) Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), p. vii.

(2) Trans. Elizabeth MacIntosh and Barbara Spackman, in Jeffrey Schnapp and Barbara Spackman, "Selections from the Great Debate on Fascism and Culture: *Critica fascista* 1926–27," *Fascism and Culture, Stanford Italian Review* VIII (1990): 242.

(3) *Critica fascista*, 15 November 1926; *Ibid.*, p. 248.

(4) Arthur Lourié, *Sergei Koussevitzky and His Epoch* (New York: Knopf, 1931), p. 196.

(5) Alfredo Casella, "Music and Politics in Italy," *Christian Science Monitor*, **19 September 1925, p. 8.**

(6) Casella, "Neoclassicism in Italy," *Christian Science Monitor*, **7 January 1928, p. 12.**

(7) *Ibid.*

(8) Casella, "About 'Returns,' " *Christian Science Monitor*, **13 October 1928, p. 12.**

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Ottorino Respighi

Arturo Toscanini

MUSIC AND MUSIC-MAKING IN THE NEW ITALY

Chapter: CHAPTER 13 Music and Totalitarian Society
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The most conspicuous feature of interwar totalitarianism as it affected music was the obvious fact that the two countries that had more or less dominated the international musical scene in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Italy and Germany, were to be found among the totalitarian powers. It is also an obvious historical fact that Italy and Germany lost their commanding musical positions during the twentieth century. The obvious question, then, is how, and to what degree, these two facts may be related.

Italy's arts policy during the period of Fascist rule was far less intrusive than the policies of the other totalitarian states. This was in keeping with the principles of the corporate state, which respected individual initiative and the autonomy of the professions, and was therefore not inherently hostile to modernism. Stravinsky's cordial relationship with Mussolini is already evidence of this tolerance. In fact it was more than tolerance: Mussolini took pride in his advanced artistic views and was glad to have Italy play host to international festivals of contemporary music like the one in Venice in 1925 at which Stravinsky performed his *Sonate* for piano "sotto il patronato di S. E. Benito Mussolini" (under the patronage of His Excellency Benito Mussolini).

Fascist cultural bureaucrats might be as philistine as their counterparts anywhere, issuing blustery, well-publicized manifestos against "atonal and polytonal honking" and "so-called objective music."[9] But Schoenberg, atonal honker par excellence, toured Italy with *Pierrot lunaire* in 1924, and his music continued to be performed there under prestigious auspices until 1938, five years after the composer had been forced out of Germany. Alban Berg's concert aria *Der Wein* had its Italian premiere at the Venice Biennale (biennial festival) in 1934; the composer, in attendance, was resoundingly fisêted. *Wozzeck* was given at the Rome Opera as late as 1942, with the war raging. (By then it had been banned not only in Germany but in Berg's native Austria as well.)

Also performed during that wartime season was the ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin*, the most modernistic composition by Bartók, the most outspoken anti-Fascist among modernists, who by then had for two years been a voluntary exile from Europe. These examples of artistic tolerance, moreover, were more than matched by the racial tolerance that the Fascist government exhibited, in pointed contrast with Germany, until 1938. Refugees from Hitler like the conductors Bruno Walter (1876–1962) and Otto Klemperer (1885–1973) regularly performed in Mussolini's Italy. The *Sacred Service*, a setting of the Reform Jewish liturgy by Ernest Bloch (1880–1959), a Jewish composer of Swiss birth, had its world premiere over Radio Turin in 1934.

In contrast to Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, where the banning of artworks was common, Mussolini's government actually suppressed a musical composition only once, in 1934. The unlucky work was an opera, *La favola del figlio cambiato* ("The fable of the changeling son") by Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882–1973), to a libretto by Pirandello. The ban was provoked not by the music, but by the setting of the second act, which takes place in a brothel. It exemplified the prudery that all totalitarian regimes have in common,

regarding sexual license as a certain path to political disorder.

fig. 13-2 Ernest Bloch with his children: Lucien, Suzanne (who became a pioneering scholar and performer of early music), and Ivan.

Still and all, the Fascist period did lend a new and unique coloration to Italian music. It was no coincidence, to begin with, that the most eminent composer of the period, and the one most lavishly promoted by the government, was known best (especially abroad) not for his operas but for his symphonic music. Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936) did write operas, of course—ten of them. Few composers from opera's birthplace did not. (Even Casella wrote three, one of them in honor of Mussolini's imperialist campaign in Ethiopia.) But all agreed that Respighi's operas were a "secondary and uneven" branch of his output, to quote John C. G. Waterhouse,[10] the foremost English expert on twentieth-century Italian music. What brought him international fame were his superbly scored programmatic suites for orchestra: *Fontane di Roma* ("Fountains of Rome," 1916), *Pini di Roma* ("Pines of Rome", 1924), *Vetrate di chiesa* ("Church windows," 1925), *Trittico botticelliano* ("Botticelli triptych," 1927), *Feste romane* ("Roman festivals," 1928).

As their very titles suggest, these works were pictorial in character rather than narrative. As an orchestral colorist Respighi was rivaled during his lifetime only by Ravel. He developed his skills by studying the scores of Richard Strauss and by submitting his early attempts for critique to Rimsky-Korsakov, the best possible teacher, during the musical seasons of 1900–1901 and 1902–1903, which Respighi spent in St. Petersburg as leader of the viola section in the orchestra of the Maryinsky Theater. He prided himself particularly (as did Strauss) on the precision of his musical depictions.

The most famous instance of Respighi's precision—the use of a phonograph recording of a singing nightingale in the *Pines of Rome*—has become controversial. Such literalness, it is often argued, misses the artistic point. (Indeed, as long ago as the first century ce, the Greek writer Plutarch, in his biography of King Agesilaus of Sparta, recounted how the king, "being invited once to hear a man who admirably imitated the nightingale, declined, saying he had heard the nightingale itself.") More darkly, it has been suggested that both the recourse to what in 1924 was "high technology," and the extreme resort to realism (to the point of coercing the listener's imagination), were indicative of a Fascist mentality.

That may be overstating the case in retrospect. But the extravagantly vivid nationalism of Respighi's scores, sentimental and aggressive by turn, and almost unprecedented in Italian music, is less easy to disengage from the clamorous politics of the day. Some of it was nostalgic or archaic, in the neoclassical fashion. Respighi arranged three orchestral suites (1917, 1923, 1931) of *Antiche arie e danze per liuto* ("Ancient airs and dances for the lute") based on transcriptions by the pioneering Italian musicologist and early-music performer Oscar Chilesotti. More interesting were the works in which Respighi took his thematic material from Gregorian chant. These included the *Church Windows* for orchestra, but also several nonprogrammatic compositions, like the *Concerto gregoriano* for violin and orchestra (1921), the *Quartetto dorico* ("String quartet in the dorian mode," 1924) and the *Concerto in modo misolidio* ("Concerto in the mixolydian mode") for piano and orchestra (1925).

And then there is *Feste romane*, Respighi's most modernistic score, full of polytonal and polyrhythmic effects and heavy with somewhat belated reminiscences of Stravinsky's neoprimitivist ballets. Its first movement, "Circus Maximus," gives full rein to the pre-or anti-Christian sentiments that the Fascist regime glorified in the name of Il Duce, the new Caesar. Deploying a huge orchestra with virtuoso facility, Respighi evokes the sadistic spectacles of ancient Rome. In its central episode, a band of Christians (identifiable by their hymn) is stalked and set upon by lions (identifiable by their cacophonous snarling and roaring) while the crowd goes wild and the *bucinatores* (trumpeters) rend the air with fanfares. The ending, seemingly modeled on the blaring chords that bring Berlioz's "March to the Scaffold" (from the *Symphonie fantastique*) to its grisly conclusion, lacks the saving irony of its prototype.

The abnegation of Christian meekness and humility in favor of Roman aggression and audacity was an explicit plank in the Fascist platform. Its musical analogue, equally explicit, was the brash orchestral virtuosity Respighi's scores exemplified. In 1931, Mussolini sent around a circular to Italian diplomats abroad on the need for projecting a new image of Italy—spartan, ruthless, militaristic. Aware of the historic importance of music in framing the national reputation, the Duce gave it special attention, heaping special scorn on the recently deceased Enrico Caruso (1873–1921), the great tenor who had in his time been Italy's chief musical ambassador:

> I prescribe that from now on, no favor be shown in any way to musical initiatives—operas, vocal recitals, concerts or musical soirées—and that they be treated icily. Exceptions will be made for symphony orchestras, whose performances give an idea of collective group discipline. All the rest must be ignored. It is high time that the world—that is, hundreds of millions of men—get to know a different type of Italian from that of yesterday—the eternal tenor and mandolinist for the entertainment of others. Caruso and the like were or are the old Italy.[11]

The chief musical representative of the new Italy, by Mussolini's implied definition, was Arturo Toscanini, in the opinion of many the century's most important conductor, who (among many greater accomplishments) was instrumental in popularizing the work of Respighi and other modern Italians abroad. Toscanini

revolutionized orchestral performance precisely in the way that Mussolini emphasized (undoubtedly with Toscanini in mind), and in a way that also exemplified the ideal of objective performance practice identified in Chapter 8 with neoclassicism. A Toscanini performance, to a degree previously unprecedented, was a display of "collective group discipline" that aimed above all for a scrupulous ("uninterpreted") realization of the musical text.

At the time Mussolini came to power, Toscanini was known primarily as a conductor of opera, in which field he was already supreme. Since 1898, though with several interruptions for engagements and residencies abroad (including a seven-year stint at New York's Metropolitan Opera), he had been the artistic director of La Scala, the Milan opera theater and Italy's premiere performing arts institution. His range was broad, encompassing Wagner, Debussy, and Chaikovsky in addition to the full Italian repertoire. He had given the world premieres of Leoncavallo's *I pagliacci* (1892) and of two operas by Puccini: *La bohème* (1896) and *La fanciulla del west* ("The girl of the golden West," 1910). He was the first non-German to be invited to conduct at the yearly Wagner Festival in Bayreuth.

Unlike most opera specialists, Toscanini had a longstanding interest in the symphonic repertoire. He conducted the Municipal Orchestra of Turin from 1898, and gave with it the world premiere of Verdi's last major work, *Quattro pezzi sacri* ("Four sacred pieces," including a Stabat Mater and a Te Deum) for chorus and orchestra. He first achieved world celebrity as a symphonic conductor during the 1920–1921 season, when, already past the age of fifty, he made a tour of Europe and America with a newly constituted La Scala Orchestra (called the Orchestra Arturo Toscanini for the occasion). In under eight months they gave 133 performances before audiences totaling over a quarter of a million.

These concerts were received everywhere as a revelation, in part for purely technical reasons. The crisp attacks and cutoffs, the transparent textures, the rhythmic precision of Toscanini's performances far exceeded contemporary standards, as may be corroborated by listening to the recordings he made with his orchestra at the Victor Talking Machine studios in Camden, New Jersey. Critics used to the Germanic approach to Beethoven and Brahms complained about Toscanini's relentless tempos and his "small, short-breathed and over-detailed"[12] conceptions (to quote Richard Aldrich, the reviewer for the *New York Times*). But audiences found the approach irresistible, and so, in consequence, did concert managers.

By 1926 Toscanini was dividing his time between La Scala and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (which had been led, from 1909 to 1911, by Gustav Mahler, the supreme apostle of the elastic German Romantic tradition). After two years as guest and associate conductor of the orchestra, Toscanini was appointed music director of the Philharmonic, which had just merged with its chief rival, the New York Symphony, to become the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. The next year he resigned from La Scala; except for guest appearances at festivals, his opera days were over.

He led the New York orchestra, which he took on triumphal tours of Europe, until 1936. He retired at the age of sixty-nine and returned to Italy; but the very next year, in 1937, he received an invitation from David Sarnoff, the head of the National Broadcasting Company, to return to America to lead a handpicked orchestra that would be created for him, that would do its performing on the radio rather than in the concert hall, and that would record the entire standard symphonic repertoire for Victor, the producers of Toscanini's first records, which was by then a subsidiary of Sarnoff's corporation. Toscanini led the NBC Symphony for seventeen years, until he re-retired, in 1954, at the age of eighty-seven. He died in New York in January 1957, two months short of his ninetieth birthday.

For the culminating phase of his career, then, Toscanini worked almost exclusively through the broadcast and recording media, achieving through technology a fame no "classical" musician had ever previously known (except, perhaps, and ironically, Caruso). He fulfilled, and then some, Mussolini's musical prediction for the New Italy, which is also ironic, since Toscanini and Mussolini had fallen out in the 1920s (leading indirectly to the conductor's retirement from La Scala), and during the 1930s and 1940s, decades spent almost entirely in America, Toscanini traded heavily on his anti-Fascist credentials and lent his celebrated name and priceless services to Allied wartime propaganda.

For this reason it may seem bizarre to discuss Toscanini in the context of totalitarianism. And yet the kind of performances he achieved were attributable as much to the dominating force of his personality, and his dictatorial behavior, as they were to his musical insight. Musicians who played under him, and who were subject to summary dismissal, experienced a veritable reign of terror that is documented not only in anecdotes but in recordings that were surreptitiously made of Toscanini's appalling outbursts of temper. Toscanini justified his behavior precisely the way political dictators do, by claiming that the ends justified the means. "Gentlemen, be democrats in life but aristocrats in art,"[13] he told his orchestras. Only the strictest hierarchy of command could achieve the precision results for which Toscanini became famous, and which the musical world has treasured ever since. But if Mussolini cannot be excused his violations of human rights because he made the trains run on time, is it right to excuse Toscanini's tyrannical behavior because he made his orchestras play in time, or submit more obediently to the composer's notations?

Toscanini's hostility toward Mussolini, and his fortuitous situation as an American "exile," made the double standard easier to maintain; but with historical distance it is clear that Toscanini was no political resister. He actually declined his one documented opportunity to give public voice to principled political opposition to the dictator, when he refused to sign an anti-Fascist manifesto circulated in 1925 by the philosopher Benedetto Croce. His run-ins with Mussolini had mainly to do with the Duce's attempts to infringe upon the conductor's authority at La Scala. It was a matter of symbolic trifles, like playing the Fascist hymn (*La Giovinezza*, "Youth") before performances, or displaying the leader's portrait in the foyer. The story of Toscanini vs. Mussolini was the tale of two Duci engaged in a protracted battle of wills.

And so the difficult problems raised by the relationship between Toscanini's methods and his results continue to nag. It is a particularly crisp and concentrated instance of the old, perpetually renegotiated dilemma concerning the relationship between the competing, possibly incompatible ideals of equality and excellence. Toscanini's revolutionary transformation of orchestral performance, amounting to the creation of a new standard of clean, efficient, uncomplicated (in a word, streamlined) execution, chimed well with Fascist ideals of polity. He contributed more than anyone else toward turning the art of musical performance into an "Art of Being Ruled," to borrow the title of a book of essays by Wyndham Lewis, a British modernist writer and painter who was notoriously a Fascist sympathizer in the years preceding the Second World War. Can we now endorse the artistic results and at the same time ignore or reject the political parallel? If we cannot, is artistic excellence achievable within a democratic society, or is it to be regarded as politically tainted?

Notes:

(9) "A Manifesto of Italian Musicians for the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century Romantic Art" (signed by, among others, Ottorino Respighi, Ildebrando Pizzetti, Riccardo Zandonai and Riccardo Pick-Mangiagalli), *La Stampa* (Turin), 17 December 1932; Harvey Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy* (New York: Norton, 1987), p. 24.

(10) John C. G. Waterhouse, "Respighi," in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. III (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 1295.

(11) Benito Mussolini, *Opera omnia* XLI (Rome, 1979): 424; Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy*, p. 17.

(12) Richard Aldrich, *New York Times*, 12 January 1921; Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini: How He Became an American Culture-God and Helped Creat a New Audience for Old Music* (New York: Knopf, 1987), p. 86.

(13) Quoted in G. Barblan, *Toscanini e la Scala* (Milan, 1972); Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy*, p. 213.

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Germany: Since 1918

Jonny spielt auf

DEGENERACY

Chapter: CHAPTER 13 Music and Totalitarian Society
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

In any case, a stance of high moral dudgeon is harder to maintain with respect to Mussolini's Italy than it is with respect to the other twentieth-century totalitarian states, whose histories were incomparably bloodier. Fascist Italy entered the phase that now inspires universal condemnation—primarily for its imperialist adventures in Africa and Albania, and its persecution of minorities—in its last decade, beginning in the mid-1930s, chiefly in consequence of its military alliance with Nazi Germany, with whose policies it had to maintain a united front.

The Nazis' arts policies were motivated by the same horridly explicit racial and ethnic biases as their political policies. Indeed there was no separate or separable arts policy: arts censorship in Nazi Germany was merely an application of Nazi race theory to art, for which reason the idea of "Nazi esthetics" is entirely incoherent both as theory and as practice. What follows, therefore, is no more than a selection of tragicomic vignettes from the history of that application.

Insofar as Nazi esthetics had a theory, it followed the theory of "degeneracy" put forth by the nineteenth-century Italian psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso (1836–1909), who ended his career as a professor of criminal anthropology at the University of Turin. Lombroso sought through empirical science to account for criminal tendencies—and thus (the chilling part) to predict and preemptively control them—by identifying the "born criminal" (*l'uomo deliquente*) as a distinct anthropological "type" with measurable physical and mental "stigmata." (Lombroso checked particularly for imperfections in the shape of the outer ear.) Such "stigmata," Lombroso alleged, were the product of a morbid genetic regression brought about by inbreeding (the Nazis added miscegenation, interracial mating), or by what we now call substance abuse.

**fig. 13-3 Lothar Heinemann, "Germany, the Land of Music" (1935),
a poster that strongly conveys the subordination of art to
totalitarian political power.**

The application of these theories to art and literature was first made by Lombroso's disciple Max Nordau (1849–1923), a Hungarian physician, in a massive two-volume treatise called *Entartung* ("Degeneration"), which appeared in 1893 and went through many printings. Nordau drew many sensational connections—or rather, asserted many facile analogies—between genetic mental or physiological decay as described by Lombroso and fin-de-siècle "decadence" in the arts, which amounted, from Nordau's middle-class perspective, to "contempt for traditional views of custom and morality." Nordau maintained that the eroticized mysticism and egomania of contemporary art (in music, say, Scriabin's), its overrefined estheticism (as in, say, Debussy), or its gruesome naturalism (as in, say, Strauss or Stravinsky) all had the same pathological basis.

That this was pseudoscience in the service of philistinism is apparent from the nature of the "evidence" that

Nordau adduced, entirely speculative and tautological:

> There might be a sure means of proving that the application of the term "degenerates" to the originators of all the *fin de siècle* movements in art and literature is not arbitrary, that it is no baseless conceit, but a fact; and that would be a careful physical examination of the persons concerned, and an inquiry into their pedigree. In almost all cases, relatives would surely be met who were undoubtedly degenerate, and one or more stigmata discovered which would indisputably establish the diagnosis of "degeneration." Science has found, together with these physical stigmata, others of a mental order, which betoken degeneracy quite as clearly as the former; so that it is not necessary to measure the cranium of an author, or to see the lobe of a painter's ear, in order to recognize the fact that he belongs to the class of degenerates.[14]

For the Nazis, the process of verification became even easier: all that was needed was evidence of "Jewish blood." Ironically enough, Max Nordau himself was not only Jewish but also an early Zionist leader; his prime example of artistic degeneracy was Wagner, and his prime diagnostic symptoms were anti-Semitism and "Teutomaniacal Chauvinism." But any number can play the same pseudoscientific game, and the theory of degeneracy was easily adapted to a new set of politically predicated stigmata. The adaptation became notorious in 1937, when the German government sponsored a huge show of otherwise unshowable modern art in Munich under the title *Entartete Kunst*, "Degenerate Art." It was followed the next year by a somewhat smaller exhibition in Düsseldorf, called *Entartete Musik*.

A deliberately ape-like caricature of the blackface title character from Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*, the wildly popular "Zeitoper" of a decade before (see Chapter 9) graced the cover of the 1938 exhibition catalogue (Fig. 13-1), which contained a list or index of banned Jewish musicians, including a few who were either mistakenly or deliberately made honorary Jews for the occasion: Alexander Glazunov, Maurice Ravel, Erik Satie, Camille Saint-Saëns. (Krenek himself was listed as *jüdisch versippt*, Jewish by marriage.)

There were a couple of somewhat more serious errors of classification. Because he was of Slavic blood and a naturalized Parisian, Igor Stravinsky was assumed to be a foe of the Nazis, and his portrait was displayed at the exhibit with the insulting caption, "Who ever invented the story that Stravinsky is descended from Russian noble stock?" The mortified composer, through his German publisher, protested to the German Bureau of Foreign Affairs at his inclusion, explicitly disavowing any taint of "Jewish cultural Bolshevism."[15] As he had previously taken the precaution of submitting an affidavit to his publisher, in lieu of the official Nazi questionnaire establishing Aryan heredity, and as the publisher had placed an item in the papers quoting Richard Strauss on Stravinsky's enthusiasm for Hitler's ideas, Stravinsky received a declaration from the German government affirming its "benevolent neutrality" toward him. (The 74-year-old Richard Strauss was not only Germany's musical elder statesman, but also for a time the figurehead president of the official Nazi musical supervisory organization, the *Reichsmusikkammer*.)

And because he was a citizen of Hungary, an ally of Germany, Béla Bartók was assumed, like the composers of Mussolini's Italy, to be a friend of the "Reich," and was therefore left out of the *Entartete Musik* exhibit. The mortified composer, who had refused his publisher's request to file what he called "the questionnaire about grandfathers,"[16] protested his exemption, attached the *E*-word to himself, and tried to prevent the performance of his music in Germany and Italy. He wrote to an official of the German Radio in 1939, about his own First Piano Concerto, that he was "astonished that such 'degenerate' music should be selected for—of all things—a radio broadcast"[17] in the Nazi state. But of course the broadcast went on as scheduled: as these examples show, for the Nazis the first question about a work of art was never, What does it say? It was, rather, Who is speaking, friend or foe?

There was no principle to override this double standard. Erich Wolfgang Korngold's opera *Das Wunder der Heliane*, mentioned in Chapter 9, aroused Nazi antipathies almost as strongly as *Jonny spielt auf*. Almost the minute it came to power, Hitler's government banned it. The stated reason both for the original antipathy and for the ban was the opera's "decadent" nude scene. But Reichsmusikkammerpräsident Strauss's *Salome* also had a nude scene, even more brazen (and certainly more garish) than Korngold's, not to mention a

libretto by Oscar Wilde, the archdegenerate of all degenerates, and yet it played steadily to good Aryan audiences throughout the Hitler years.

True, Salome perishes at the end of "her" opera, while Heliane triumphs at the end of "hers," but the real reason for the ban on the latter was the Jewishness of its composer, who had to flee as soon as the Nazis annexed Austria to the German Reich; and the reason for *Salome*'s survival was the venerable name of *its* composer—"international celebrity, German, late romanticist, advocate for copyright protection and senior citizen,"[18] in the words of Pamela Potter, the best-informed historian of the Nazi musical establishment. It was his interest in lengthening the term of copyright for composers that induced Strauss to accept from Hitler a bureaucratic post. Strauss's collaboration—like that of the great conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886–1954), Toscanini's only rival in fame and authority from within the Germanic-romantic "mainstream" —offered the Nazis the most potent insurance they could buy against the charge of barbarism.

Notes:

(14) Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1895), p. 17.

(15) See Igor Stravinsky, *Selected Correspondence*, Vol. III, ed. Robert Craft (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), pp. 265–70.

(16) Béla Bartók to Frau Professor Dr. Oscar Müller-Widmann, Basle, 13 April 1938; Béla Bartók, *Letters*, ed. János Demény (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), p. 268.

(17) Béla Bartók to Hans Priegnitz, 12 January 1939: *Béla Bartók's Letters*, ed. János Demény (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), p. 274.

(18) Pamela M. Potter, "Strauss and the National Socialists," in *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 109.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Carl Orff

Carmina burana

YOUTH CULTURE

Chapter: CHAPTER 13 Music and Totalitarian Society
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

That charge was frequently leveled against the music of Carl Orff (1895–1982), the foremost German composer to achieve international eminence during the Nazi years, and the only one whose music has survived in the international repertory. The work that made him famous was *Carmina burana* (1936), a "scenic cantata" (sometimes staged as a ballet with singing, like Stravinsky's *Les noces*) based on "Goliard" poems—Latin poems by German students of the late middle ages that lustily celebrated the vagabond life. The largest extant collection of Goliard poems is a manuscript now kept at the Bavarian State Museum in Munich, but which had belonged for centuries to the Catholic monastery at Benediktbeuren, a town nearby; *Carmina burana* means "Songs of Beuren.") Orff, who lived all his life in Munich, made a selection of songs from the manuscript, which he knew from a nineteenth-century edition that contained only the texts, and grouped them into "scenes" on the basis of their subject matter: songs of fatalism under the heading *Fortuna imperatrix mundi* ("Dame Fortune, the ruler of the world"); nature songs (*Primo vere*, "In early spring"); carousing songs (*In taberna*, "In the tavern"); songs of love (*Cour d'Amours*, "At Venus's court"). The music—scored for eight soloists, three choruses, and a huge orchestra including five percussionists, full of diatonic melodies in a vaguely antique ("modal" or at least "leading-toneless") style, and driven by vigorous, unyielding ostinatos — was a streamlined "populist" (in German, *Völkisch*) adaptation of Stravinsky's neoprimitivist manner that made its appeal to a much wider audience than did the modernist ("elitist") original.

fig. 13-4 Carl Orff, 1930.

ex. 13-1a Carl Orff, *Carmina burana*, no. 1, "O fortuna," mm. 5–28

The opening number ("O Fortuna," Ex. 13-1a), which also serves as the finale, sets the tone. Although written out in full, it is a strophic song in three stanzas (the first a bit truncated, the last somewhat embellished) to a tune that until the final melisma uses only the first five degrees of a D-minor (or, arguably, a "Dorian") scale. Although composed by Orff, it is meant to sound like an authentic medieval tune (of which the Benediktbeuren manuscript actually contains many). The climactic number ("Tempus est iocundum," "It is the time of joy"; Ex. 59-1b) is of a similar design, this time in five slightly varied strophes, and followed by a melismatic soprano solo — "Dulcissime" (O Sweetie!; Ex. 13-1c) — that, without actually saying so, is as unmistakably a portrait of feminine sexual ecstasy as the preceding chorus, with its huffing and puffing ("oh, oh, oh...") had been one of masculine potency.

ex. 13-1b Carl Orff, *Carmina burana*, no. 22, "Tempus est iocundum"

ex. 13-1c Carl Orff, *Carmina burana*, no. 23, "Dulcissime"

After its 1937 premiere, at which a certain amount of unofficial discomfort was expressed at the frank sexual innuendoes, *Carmina burana*'s instant popularity and international success won it official approval as a display piece celebrating Nazi "youth culture." In 1943, at the height of the war, Orff followed up with a sequel, *Catulli carmina* ("Songs of Catullus"), a setting of erotic poems by the Roman poet named in the title. Subtitled "Ludi scaenici" ("scenic games"), it was another ballet with songs, consisting of twelve *a cappella* choruses framed by a huge choral-instrumental number that in its scoring for soloists, chorus, four pianos, and a huge battery requiring the services of a timpanist and a dozen assistant percussionists, announced even more plainly its derivation from Stravinsky's *Noces*. (Stravinsky was by this time banned again in Nazi Germany, not for musical or ethnic reasons but simply because he was an "enemy national" living in the United States.) Somehow Orff managed to strip the already virtually denuded style of *Carmina burana* even further down in the new piece, producing an even franker, ruder, more athletic eroticism.

In the passage shown in Ex. 13-2, for example, the poet hymns at length the beauty of his beloved's breasts. Just like medieval churchmen confronted with the Hebrew psalms or the Song of Songs, the puritanical critics of the official Nazi press managed to reconcile themselves to the content of Orff's cantatas by giving them allegorical, "politically correct" interpretations. The critic of the *Zeitschrift für Musik*, since Schumann's day the leading German musical paper, claimed that *Carmina burana* was "in terms of expression, a Song of Songs praising the strength of the unbroken life-instinct," hence an antidote to "decadence," and exulted that "German musical creativity in our day can produce such a work."[19] The *Völkischer Beobachter* ("People's observer"), the Nazi Party's official organ, pointed to Orff's cantatas as "the kind of clear, stormy, and yet always disciplined music that our time requires."[20]

ex. 13-2 Carl Orff, _Catulli carmina_, "mammae molliculae"

Stravinsky, when he came to know these imitations of his own youthful style, dismissed them with a snicker as "Neo-Neanderthal."[21] (More recently it has been described as "pop Gothic") There were many who saw Orff's celebrations of youthful vitality as debased (if not newly — and hypocritically — "decadent"), and saw their popularity as evidence of that fact. And there were just as many who dismissed such criticism as a remnant of high-modernist snobbery and greeted the simple music for its infectiousness, its ability to bond an audience in the spirit of _Gemeinschaft_, "community." Such defenders of Orff could remind his critics that not only Nazis, and not only totalitarians, had called for art to fulfill a communitarian aim and carry a social message. (In Weimar Germany, we may recall from Chapter 9, Weill and Eisler, not to mention Brecht, had made a similar appeal from the political left, and might well have welcomed music like Orff's had it been set to a different sort of text.)

Back at them comes the argument that in Nazi Germany the spirit of _Gemeinschaft_ had been hopelessly tainted by _Volksgemeinschaft_, "ethnic communalism," a tribalism that was as much an exclusionary as a communitarian sentiment. In its insistent simplicities and its hypnotic rhythmic monotony, Orff's music,

which so effectively roused primitive, unreflective enthusiasm in millions, was inviting (or compelling) its listeners, to put it as Hitler did, to "think with their blood" instead of their brains, and was thus humanly as well as artistically debasing. Historically, the best (or most specifically) grounded approach to the question of Orff's place within the culture of Nazism would situate the reception of his orgiastic and "paganistic" cantatas within the context of the propaganda war the Nazi Party was waging against the Christian churches of Germany, both Catholic and Protestant, which resisted the Nazi doctrine of hatred as long as possible.

The controversy, which reached a head in 1936–37 (the period of *Carmina burana*'s genesis and premiere), ended with a ban on all political activities by clergymen outside their houses of worship. In the decree silencing the churches, promulgated on 12 September 1938, Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess (1894–1987) emphasized the need to combat Christianity ("a doctrine from the Near East and Jewish through and through") not by direct polemics but by counterexample:

> The more we National Socialists avoid religious controversies, abstain from Church ceremonies, but on the other hand win the confidence of the people by our dutifulness, justice, and loyalty, the more men will feel that they belong to National Socialism. The more National Socialism is seen as a blessing as a result of our work and the conviction spreads that Providence is with us and with our work, the more people will recognize that National Socialism is a God-ordained order and institution. Thus they will gradually become increasingly alienated by the Churches and their dogmas in the degree to which the latter stand in our way.[22]

After the outbreak of the war in 1939, the Nazi government actually tried to set up a competing anti-Christian and explicitly neo-Pagan religious denomination, that of the *Gottgläubige* ("Believers in God"). Beginning in 1940, Orff's cantata was performed at Party and government functions, and received the status of a quasi-official anthem.

The continuing popularity of Orff's cantatas since the war, both in and outside of Germany, has worked to counteract the taint of association. Debate has proceeded on a new footing, the main question now being whether the origin or original context of an artwork has a decisive bearing on its interpretation or its effect, or whether works like *Carmina burana* and *Catulli carmina* can now be taken at face value and enjoyed as innocently mindless fun and games. Orff's continued popularity has also quickened postwar debate as to whether hermetic, difficult modernist art, insofar as it is so much less easily exploited for possibly unsavory or even criminal political purposes, might after all be morally superior to "accessible" art. (Whatever Schoenberg may have been, to put it bluntly, at least he was no rabble-rouser.) One of the things that make these questions hard is the fact that they cannot be answered simply on the basis of the composer's intention. Nothing that has been said about Orff's work is evidence of his own political or social beliefs. After the war, like most Germans, he claimed to have been opposed to the Hitler regime. The present discussion has not accused him of Nazism, just as the discussion of Respighi made no claims about his personal commitment to Mussolini's policies. (We have far stronger evidence of Stravinsky's commitments in that regard than we do of Respighi's or Orff's.) Were it established that Orff was anti-Nazi and Respighi anti-Fascist, the information would be relevant to their biographies, but not of decisive import in interpreting their works, which left their hands the moment they were performed and have in any case outlived their authors. The question of political meaning is as much or more a question about reception as it is a question about intention.

But neither intention nor reception alone can be decisive. If an author's intention were the sole criterion for evaluating his work, Wagner's *Ring* would surely draw picket lines today (as it does in the state of Israel); and if reception were the sole criterion, then Beethoven and Bruckner would draw picket lines, since the Nazis claimed them, along with Wagner, as spiritual forerunners. In any case, musical life in Nazi Germany continued to function at a high professional level. The performance traditions that had previously been established for the German classics reached new heights of achievement, as recordings that continue to circulate, and to be enjoyed everywhere, attest.

This, too, has made for aesthetic quandaries: since the Second World War it has been much more difficult to

claim that exposure to the greatest masterpieces of art is inherently ennobling. The Germans continued to be sincere and discriminating lovers of their finest music (and thanks to Furtwängler, experienced the finest performances of it) all through the period of Nazi atrocity. It did not inhibit the prevailing barbarism of the period in any way. (And in this sad observation may unexpectedly lie Orff's best defense; for if Bach and Beethoven could not prevent Nazi barbarity is it hard to claim that Orff could have inspired it.)

Notes:

(19) Horst Büttner, "Hochkultur und Volkskunst: 68. Tonkünstlerversammlung des Allgemeinen Deutschen Musikvereins vom 8. bis 13. Juni in Darmstadt und Frankfurt a. M.," *Zeitschrift für Musik* CIV, no. 8 (August 1937), 873; trans. Steven Moore Whiting.

(20) *Völkischer Beobachter* 7 October 1940; trans. S. M. Whiting.

(21) Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 123.

(22) Rudolf Hess, address to the Gauleiters of Nuremberg, 12 September 1938; Peter Matheson, *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches: A Documentary Account of Christian Resistance and Complicity during the Nazi Era* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1981), p. 75.

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Béla Bartók

Igor Stravinsky

Paul Hindemith

VARIETIES OF EMIGRATION

Chapter: CHAPTER 13 Music and Totalitarian Society
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The only musicians who could avoid questions of complicity with the Nazi regime were the many who emigrated from Germany during the dozen years of its ascendancy. But even emigration had its degrees and nuances. Some emigration was forced, like that of Jews or Communists or others for whom remaining in Germany would have been fatal. The most celebrated forced emigrant was of course Schoenberg, formerly an ardent German cultural chauvinist, who defiantly reconverted to the Hebrew faith of his ancestors in Paris in 1933, and who went on from there to the United States, where he spent the last seventeen years of his life, eight of them (1936–44) on the faculty of the University of California at Los Angeles. Other famous forced emigrés included Weill, Eisler, and Brecht, the conductors Bruno Walter and Otto Klemperer, the cellist Emanuel Feuermann (1902–42), and the music scholars Alfred Einstein (1880–1952) and Curt Sachs (1881–1959). All of them ended up in the United States, the musical life of which was enormously enriched by their presence, and which willy-nilly found itself at the end of the war with the greater part of the former European musical élite among its citizens.

For Bartók, Stravinsky, and Hindemith were also in America at war's end. They were voluntary émigrés. Bartók alone was purely a principled exile; as we have already seen he was a committed anti-Fascist and an outspoken opponent of the Nazi regime. He did not have to fear for his life or livelihood in Hungary, and he suffered many hardships in America, where he was not yet by any means a celebrity. He had to eke out a living as a piano teacher and occasional performer, and as the holder of a research sinecure in folklore that was tendered to him by Columbia University as an act of charity, at the instigation of Paul Henry Láng (1901–91), a Hungarian-born professor of musicology there. (Bartók's stature as a composer rose tremendously, ironically enough, almost immediately after his death in New York from leukemia in September 1945.)

Stravinsky's emigration was more opportunistic than voluntary. The beginning of the war found him already in the United States, at the invitation of Harvard University, which had offered him a guest professorship to deliver the lectures that were later published as *Poetics of Music*. Although his political sympathies at the time of the war's outbreak were equivocal to say the least, Stravinsky decided to remain in America after his Harvard tenure expired, so as to avoid the turbulent conditions on the European continent that would have made concentration on his work difficult. (He had sought neutral territory during World War I as well, which he sat out in Switzerland.) He bought a house in Hollywood, California, in 1940, not far from where Schoenberg was living, and took American citizenship in 1945. Their physical proximity did not lead to any lessening of the personal and esthetic tensions that had divided Schoenberg and Stravinsky in Europe. During the eleven years that they lived as neighbors they met only twice, by chance.

The Hindemith case was complicated. By the time the Nazis came to power he was not only a famous performer but was also long established as the foremost composition teacher in Berlin next to Schoenberg, and it was inevitably "next to Schoenberg" that he was viewed. Thus despite his avant-garde reputation he was deemed, at least by comparison, acceptable to the new regime, and there is evidence of his early wish to accommodate it. The more radical Nazi contingents opposed him, however, and launched a press campaign

in 1934 to discredit him on the basis of his earlier associations with leftist musicians and his continuing associations with Jewish playing partners, not to mention his scandalous early operas and a chamber concerto in which he was accused of parodying a favorite Nazi march.

fig. 13-5 Paul Hindemith with viola, photo ca. 1930.

Furtwängler came to his defense in a widely disseminated newspaper article, "Der Fall Hindemith" ("The Hindemith case"), in which the conductor put Hindemith forth as the model for German composers of the day. The result was an intensified backlash against him in the press and at public Nazi functions. Although he suffered no material reprisals or personal threats, Hindemith decided in 1937 that he had best leave the country, in part because his wife was Jewish and he expected eventually to lose his professorship on that account. After three years in Switzerland he came to America. In 1941 he was appointed Battel Professor of the Theory of Music at Yale University, a position he held (eventually part time) until 1953, when he returned to Europe, spending his last decade again in Switzerland.

Hindemith did not consider himself a voluntary émigré, but felt that he had been hounded out of Germany.

He left resentfully, and worked out his feelings of alienation on his American colleagues and pupils, with whom he achieved a legendary reputation for haughty arrogance and disparagement. (He awarded only twelve students masters' degrees in composition during his entire tenure at Yale.) Although his reputation gave him considerable authority, and he had an impact both on music education and on American composing styles, Hindemith held himself aloof from the musical life of his adopted country despite his accepting American citizenship in 1946 and holding it to the end of his life. His most public (and possibly his most influential) activity in America, curiously, was in organizing and leading a Collegium Musicum at Yale—that is, a performing group not for contemporary but for "ancient" music, with which he made his only American appearances as a performer during his period of residence there, and with which he made some records. In short, his life in America ironically paralleled the sort of life he would have led had he remained in Germany: one of withdrawal from public life, or what was known in Germany as "inner emigration."

That Hindemith had inner emigration on his mind even while still in Germany is evident on the basis of his most celebrated work, the three-act opera *Mathis der Maler* ("Matthias the painter"), composed to his own libretto, which he began writing in 1934, the year of his disillusionment, and which received its premiere in Switzerland in 1938, after he had gone into exile. (A symphony on themes from the opera, also called *Mathis der Maler*, was actually composed in advance of the rest; Furtwängler gave it its very successful premiere in March 1934, and it became the focal point of his attempted defense of the composer.) Ostensibly based on the life and times of Matthias Grünewald, the fifteenth-century German religious painter, the opera depicts an artist who retreats, spiritually wounded, from the turbulent world of contemporary politics—a world replete with class warfare and book burnings—into the timeless world of art.

It was in fact an allegory of the composer's own inner emigration, as Hindemith pointedly implied in his program essay for the premiere, in which the expatriated composer identified himself not only with Mathis, who "decides in his work to develop traditional art to its fullest extent," but also, and predictably, with J. S. Bach, who "two centuries later proves to be a traditionalist in the stream of musical development."[23] At a time of anxiety and threat (in Hindemith's day political, in Bach's, presumably, merely stylistic), the true artist serves his art by withdrawal, enabling its preservation.

This was a new conception of Bach's role as universal model, born of a new twist in the politics of the twentieth century. Hindemith, who by the rather embittered end of his life was considered a very conservative composer indeed, would remain faithful to his new image of Bach for the duration of his composing career. In a sentimental lecture called *Johann Sebastian Bach: Heritage and Obligation*, delivered in Hamburg to honor Bach's bicentennial in 1950, the former prophet of *neue Sachlichkeit* located Bach's crowning achievement in the complete transcendence of the worldly: his "activity has become pure thought, freed from all incidents and frailties of structural manifestation, and he who ascended relentlessly has defeated the realm of substance and penetrated the unlimited region of thought."[24] In the works that followed *Mathis der Maler*, and especially in those of his American years, Hindemith tried his best to follow "his" Bach into the realm of pure speculation. During his brief Swiss exile he tried his hand at speculative theory, coming up with a revised tonal system to save the "natural" or "acoustic" basis of harmony in an age of "artificial" systems like Schoenberg's. His system, embodied in a textbook called *Unterweisung in Tonsatz* (1937–39; published in English in 1942 as *The Craft of Musical Composition*), replaced the circle of fifths with a new tonal hierarchy, purportedly derived from the overtone series, that arranged the degrees of the chromatic scale "concentrically," in intervallic pairs of increasing functional distance from the keynote (Ex. 13-3): dominant/subdominant, submediant/mediant, flatmediant/flatsubmediant, supertonic/flat subtonic, "Neapolitan" supertonic/leading tone, tritone (equidistant from the keynote in both directions).
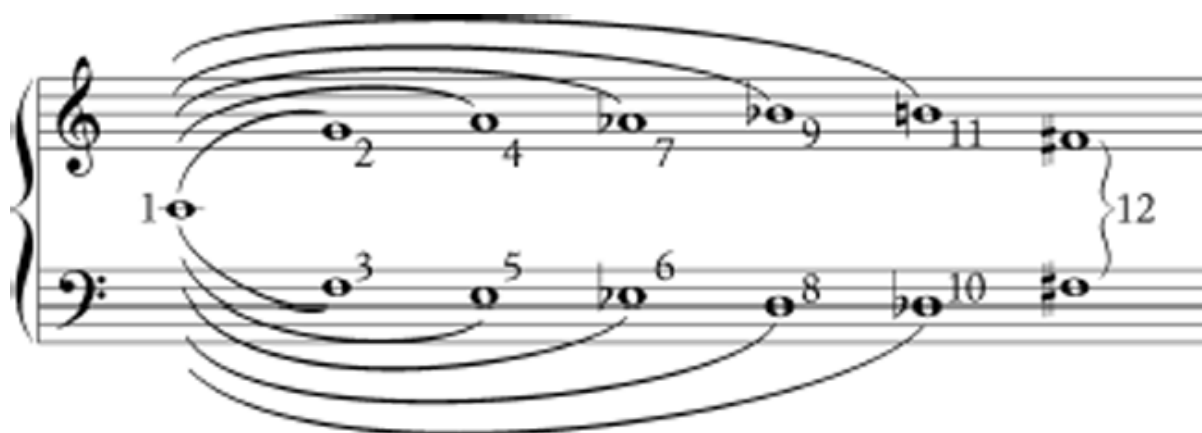
ex. 13-3 Paul Hindemith, "Series I" from *Unterweisung in Tonsatz*

One of the first works Hindemith completed in America, *Ludus tonalis* ("The game [or play] of tones," 1942), subtitled "Studies in Counterpoint, Tonal Organization, and Piano Playing," was a systematic practical application of his theories in emulation of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Instead of Bach's twenty-four preludes and fugues, Hindemith presents twelve fugues (since his system did not distinguish major and minor modes), framed by a Preludium and a Postludium (the Preludium in mirror inversion) and connected by eleven interludes that bridge their keys and moods. The keys are presented in an order corresponding to Ex. 13-3, which Hindemith called "Series I." (Series II is an array of harmonic intervals that assigns a root to each so that logical progressions can be plotted.) As one can see from the way in which Fugue No. 5 ends (Ex. 13-4)—somewhat willfully or wistfully, perhaps—on a plain and placid major triad, Hindemith has indeed withdrawn from the mad stylistic rat-race of the twentieth century in which he had played a very conspicuous role before the commotions and coercions of the times had overwhelmed him, in favor of an imagined tonal utopia—a far, far better (or at least more orderly) place than the one history had wrought.

ex. 13-4 Paul Hindemith, *Ludus tonalis*, Interlude and Fugue no. 5 (in E)

Even more tellingly, Hindemith revised some of his earlier, expressionistic or new-objective works so that they might enter his timeless tonal paradise. The most radical and striking revision of this kind involved the song cycle *Das Marienleben* ("The life of Mary"), op. 27 (1923), to ecstatic poems by Rainer Maria Rilke. The religious subject matter of this particular work made its compliance with timeless values and verities especially urgent. Hindemith began revising it in 1936, just as he was formulating his new rules of harmony, and finished the new version in 1948. The cycle's key sequence was reordered in conformity with Series I, its harmonies were clarified in conformity with Series II, and its melodic writing was tamed to make it more practicable for the singer.

The two versions of *Das Marienleben* have become a touchstone for criticism; one's preference for the original (composed as an act of passionate engagement with the novelties and challenges of the day) or the revision (composed as an act of withdrawal from the same, amounting to an inner emigration) says a lot about one's attitude toward modernism. The endings of both versions of the final song, "Vom Tode Mariä III" ("Third song on the death of Mary") are given for comparison in Ex. 13-5.

Notes:

(23) Program note to the première production of *Mathis der Maler* (28 May 1938); rpt. in the libretto booklet accompanying the Angel recording (SZCX-3869, 1979).

(24) Paul Hindemith, *Johann Sebastian Bach: Heritage and Obligation* (trans. of *J. S. Bach: Ein verpflichtendes Erbe*) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. 40–41.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Karl Amadeus Hartmann

Anton Webern

SHADES OF GRAY

Chapter: CHAPTER 13 Music and Totalitarian Society
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
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ex. 13-5a Paul Hindemith, *Das Marienleben*, "Vom Tode Mariä III," 1923 version, end

ex. 13-5b Paul Hindemith, *Das Marienleben*, "Vom Tode Mariä III," 1948 version, end

The most noteworthy and literal case of inner emigration among composers who remained in Germany was that of the Munich composer Karl Amadeus Hartmann (1905–63). By the time of the Nazi takeover, Hartmann had already made a name for himself with a few piano and chamber pieces of a "new-objective" character, including a *Jazz-Toccata und Fuge* (1928) and two works for wind ensemble—*Tanzsuite* (1931) and *Burleske Musik* (1930)—that drew upon the composer's experience, both in wind playing and in contemporary dance music, as a professional trombonist. From 1933 to 1945 not a note of Hartmann's was played in Germany. Between 1933 and 1939 he submitted his music to competitions and festivals in neighboring countries (France, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Belgium), but with the coming of the war Hartmann's withdrawal from public life became absolute.

During the war years Hartmann composed three symphonies in a newly "subjective" or neoromantic style, all of them bitterly lamenting or remonstrative works at a time when official Nazi art, like all totalitarian art,

was invincibly optimistic. One of them—*Sinfonia dramatica: China kämpft* ("Dramatic Symphony: China struggles," 1942)—would have counted as politically seditious had it been performed. They were written, however, "for the drawer." In the fall of 1942, Hartmann traveled to Vienna and took lessons from Webern, but never adopted the twelve-tone technique.

fig. 13-6 Karl Amadeus Hartmann and his wife with (at right) Stravinsky, in Munich; photo 1956.

Immediately after the war Hartmann founded Musica Viva, a performing organization for new music, which made a specialty of acquainting audiences with music that the Nazi regime had banned. His wartime works were performed there, and also at other new music centers that were cropping up in Germany, and won him enormous acclaim and prestige. By the time of his fairly early death he had composed another eight symphonies, and was widely credited with reviving the Austro-German symphonic tradition, dormant since the death of Mahler. Between 1948 and 1961, Hartmann was awarded major prizes practically on a yearly basis. He was honored not only as a musician but also as a heroic political resister at a time when Germany was in dire need of new role models.

Of course the situation was more complicated than that. Hartmann was able to sustain his much-admired stance of principled if passive opposition during the war, composing prolifically but refusing to participate in the musical life of his corrupted homeland, because he was economically privileged. He lived off the generosity of his father-in-law, a wealthy factory manager, who provided Hartmann and his family with a spacious apartment, the use of a suburban summer home where they lived full-time at the height of the war when Munich was subjected to aerial attacks, and freedom from the need to seek salaried employment.

To take these factors into consideration is by no means to impugn the sincerity of Hartmann's dissidence; but it paints his story, like those of Orff and Hindemith, in shades of gray. As Michael Kater, a sympathetic but unsentimental historian of the arts in Nazi Germany, has put it, Hartmann's situation mixes elements of

sacrifice with elements of "self-centeredness, sometimes to the point of narcissism,"[25] especially as regards the claims of wartime suffering on which the composer's postwar reputation as a moral paragon were largely based. One's tendency in retrospect is to imagine life under totalitarianism in terms of stark choices and moral extremes. Real-life conditions and alternatives are seldom so clear-cut.

Most poignant of all, perhaps, was the case of Webern. From the time of the German annexation of Austria in 1938 until his dreadful death, on 15 September 1945, in the aftermath of the German defeat (shot by an American soldier in the course of a raid on his home on account of his son-in-law's black-market activities), Webern, shorn of performance prospects for his "degenerate" music, was altogether shut out of public musical life. He subsisted on private lessons and a small pension. He continued to compose for the drawer at his slow devoted pace, completing his last three compositions (Variations for Orchestra, op. 30, and two Cantatas to texts by his poet friend Hildegard Jone, opp. 29 and 31) in conditions of virtual seclusion.

Considering not only the conditions in which he worked but also the esoteric, utopian qualities of his music, Webern would seem the archetypal "inner emigrant," retreating from his adverse surroundings into a purer world of art and scholarship. So, indeed, he was regarded in the immediate postwar decades, when his music became for many a shining model of transcendent artistry surviving in a time of depravity, thence a symbol of pertinacious resistance to evil. The uncompromising character of his music, its commitment to reviled but unsullied artistic ideals, became an emblem of uncompromising ethics.

It was therefore an agonizing discovery for many when evidence began mounting in the late 1970s that Webern had been a supporter of the Nazi regime. Hartmann had already found this out in 1942. He cut his studies with Webern short because, as he wrote back to his wife,

> The conversation kept returning to politics. I would not have steered it there, for I learned things that I would rather not have heard. He seriously defended the viewpoint that, for dear order's sake, *any kind* of authority should be respected and that the State under which one lives would have to be recognized at any price.[26]

That much sounds like resignation, but Webern's letters show him reading Hitler's autobiography *Mein Kampf* ("My struggle") with exhilaration, and exulting in Germany's prosecution of the war. "Are things not going forward with giant steps?" he wrote a friend in 1940, still using the hyperbolic tone and style we may recall from his lectures and writings on music, quoted in chapters 6 and 12:

> This is Germany today! But the *National Socialist* one, to be sure! This is the *new* state, for which the seed was already laid twenty years ago. Yes, a *new state* it is, one that has never existed before!! *It is something new!* Created by this unique man!!![27]

There are elements here of hysteria and denial that require a sort of analysis far beyond the scope of a book like this. But that we are hopelessly in a realm of comfortless moral grays is evident. Webern's tragicomic powers of dissociation were not at all unusual at the time, however difficult it may be at half a century's remove to empathize with them. There was, to begin with, the dissociation of the Nazi regime from the anti-Semitic policies that had made an exile out of Schoenberg, Webern's beloved mentor. Webern, who was not personally anti-Semitic, continued as long as possible his association with Jewish musicians, and even deplored official persecutions, though he usually ascribed reports of them to anti-German propaganda.

Stranger yet, perhaps, was his inability to grasp the fact that the music to which he was committed was considered socially unacceptable beyond all petition or appeal by the new rulers of his country. Webern persisted in the quixotic belief that the historical inevitability of dodecaphonic music paralleled the historical inevitability of Nazism, that both were the fruits of German greatness, and that eventually he (or someone) would be able "to convince the Hitler regime of the rightness of the twelve-tone system."[28] It would be far too simple, as well as invidious, to draw direct parallels between the order that Webern sought in his art and the order that, to Hartmann's dismay, he upheld in political discussions. But here, too, Webern was not alone. Although Schoenberg would have been persecuted for his ethnic background no matter what kind of

music he wrote, twelve-tone music was indeed tainted by association in Nazi eyes as "Jewish" as well as "Bolshevik." Or so many official documents proclaimed. And yet, amazingly enough, there was an officially tolerated cadre of twelve-tone composers in the Third Reich. Its members included Winfried Zillig (1905–63), a former pupil of Schoenberg, who had a successful career as an opera conductor in German-occupied Poland during the war; and Paul von Klenau (1883–1946), a Danish composer who made his career in Germany, and whose historical operas—*Michael Kohlhaas* (1933), *Rembrandt van Rijn* (1937), and *Elisabeth von England* (1939)—were successfully produced there despite his use of twelve-tone procedures.

Nor did von Klenau keep them hidden. On the contrary, exactly as Webern might have wished, he proclaimed the virtues—the specifically Nazi virtues—of twelve-tone music in the public press, openly touting the method as "totalitarian," and claiming that its strict discipline made it "entirely appropriate to the future direction of the 'National Socialist World.'" He justified it further as "consistent with Nazi insistence on technical competence," and, in its strictness, as an antidote to the "individualistic arbitrariness" that had formerly plagued modern music.[29]

So was it inherently "degenerate" or inherently "totalitarian"? Inherently Jewish or inherently Nazi? The questions, one must surely recognize by now, are silly. Musical techniques do not have political sympathies or ethnic backgrounds; the people who use them are the ones that do. And as people are inconstant and inconsistent, their means of expression are shaped and colored by their expressive aims. Twelve-tone music has been interpreted in many cultural contexts and in the light of many subtexts. The most contentious period of such readings, of course, took place after the war.

One foreshadow of it is relevant here. In his *Doktor Faustus* (1949), an allegory of the Nazi period in the form of the biography of a fictitious composer who is the complete inner emigrant, the war-exiled German novelist Thomas Mann (1875–1955) made an elaborate, though implicit, comparison between the twelve-tone system and the Nazi political regime. Its point was a dual paradox: as Hitler enslaved the German people so as to liberate "Germany," so the twelve-tone system regimented the notes in a musical composition to an unprecedented degree in order to achieve the ultimate artistic "autonomy." (In a note added to the English translation at the insistence of its infuriated inventor, Mann called the twelve-tone system "the intellectual property of a contemporary composer and theoretician, Arnold Schoenberg"; Schoenberg's rejoinder: "We will see who is whose contemporary!")[30]

Notes:

(25) Michael H. Kater, *Composers of the Nazi Era: Eight Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 97.

(26) Karl Amadeus Hartmann, *Kleine Schriften* (Mainz Schott, 1965), "Lektionen bei Anton Webern"; quoted in Hans Moldenhauer and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work* (New York: Knopf, 1978), pp. 540–41.

(27) Anton Webern to Joseph Hueber, May 1940; Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern*, p. 527.

(28) Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern*, p. 474 (reporting a conversation with Hans Erich Apostel).

(29) Quoted in Erik Levi, "Atonality, 12-Tone Music and the Third Reich," *Tempo*, no. 178 (1991), p. 21.

(30) Arnold Schoenberg, letter to the editor, *Saturday Review of Literature*, 1 January 1949; quoted in H. H. Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work*, trans. Humphrey Searle (New York: Schirmer, 1977), p. 494.

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See also from Grove Music Online
Socialist realism

Modernism

SOCIALIST REALISM AND THE SOVIET AVANT-GARDE

Chapter: CHAPTER 13 Music and Totalitarian Society
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Inner emigration, by and large, was not an option for the artists of Soviet Russia. While the overtly genocidal policies of the Nazi regime have earned it supremacy in the annals of human horror, most historians agree that the Soviet regime, particularly during the reign of Joseph Stalin (1879–1953), its most adamant dictator, was the most oppressive of the twentieth-century totalitarian states in terms of general regimentation of the population, and the most intrusive into the daily lives of its inhabitants. In a bitterly ironic twist, it was precisely the egalitarian and communitarian ideals on which the Communist regime was founded—"from each according to his ability; to each according to his needs,"[31] in the words of Marx—that eventually justified what may have been the bloodiest political terror the world had ever seen. It was a replay of the aftermath of the French Revolution, but on a scale only twentieth-century technology could enable.

Principled or alienated withdrawal from public affairs in such a society was impossible. Anyone not engaged in productive, salaried employment (and all citizens were in effect the government's employees) was judged a social parasite and prosecuted under law. Nowhere were the demands of citizenship more pervasive or more zealously enforced, and artists were citizens above all. Neither in Fascist Italy nor in Nazi Germany were the arts so policed and watchdogged as in the Soviet Union, nor did the Italian or German governments ever promulgate a theory that would effectively transform the arts into a delivery system for state propaganda, as did the Soviet government under Stalin.

That theory was called "socialist realism." It was defined in countless encyclopedias and dictionaries as "a creative method based on the truthful, historically concrete artistic reflection of reality in its revolutionary development."[32] The wording was framed by Andrey Alexandrovich Zhdanov (1896–1948), a member of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party with responsibilities for overseeing the arts, and was enunciated in 1932, at the first Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers, by the famous novelist Maxim Gorky (1868–1936), who had just returned from emigration, and who allowed himself to be used as a figurehead for the dissemination of official doctrine.
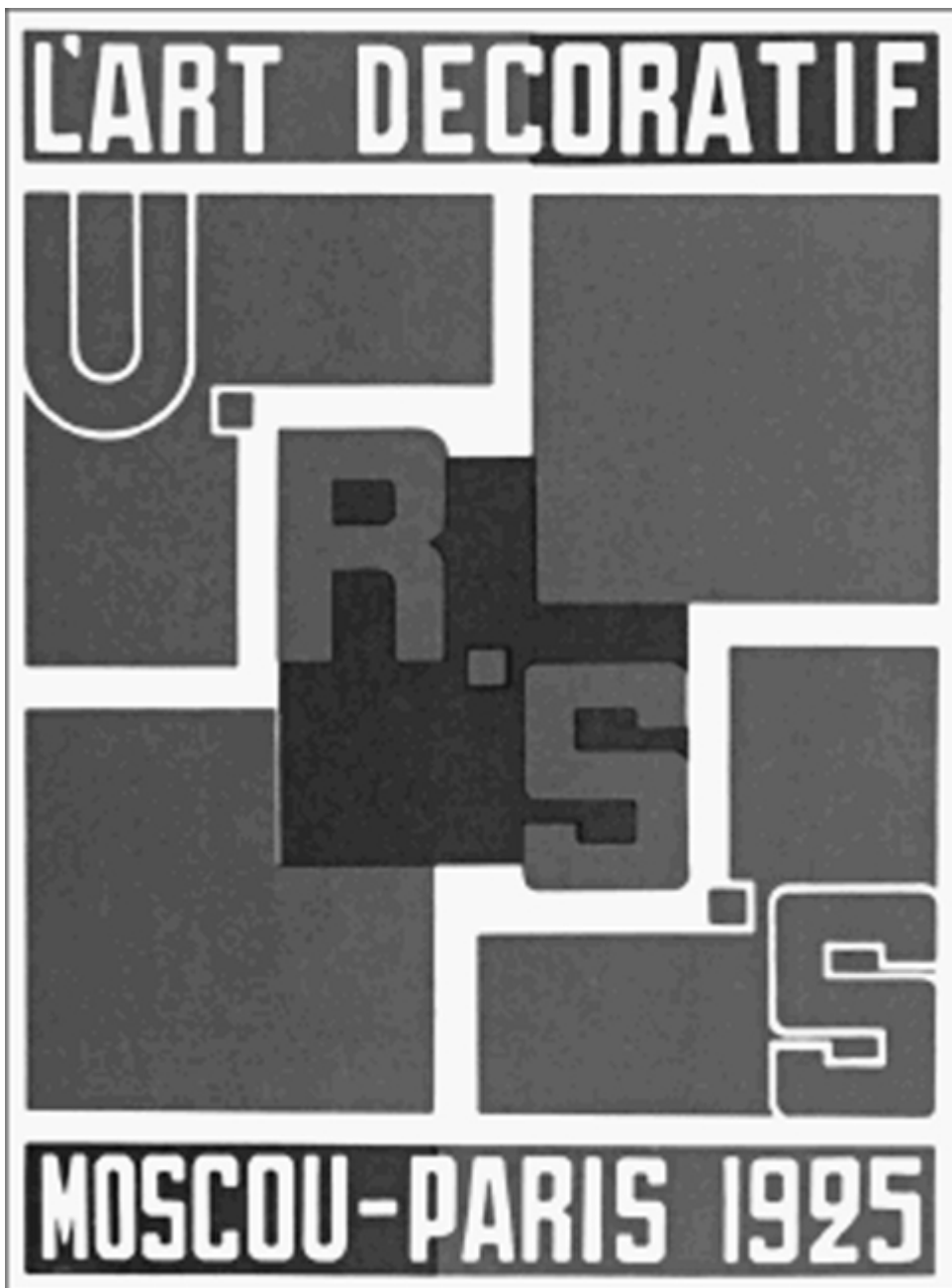
fig. 13-7 Poster by Alexander Rodchenko for the Soviet section of the Paris Art Deco Exposition, 1925.

It is from that year, 1932, in which official unions were set up for writers, graphic and plastic artists, and composers, that stringent Stalinist controls over the arts are usually said to date. During the first decade and a half after the Russian revolution, the arts were far less subject to direct state intervention. Nor was modernism discouraged, since revolutionary politics was seen as a form of avant-gardism that sought an appropriately maximalistic reflection in art. "You are revolutionaries in art, we are revolutionaries in life" said Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Soviet commissar of culture and education, to Prokofieff when the latter announced his intention to emigrate. "We ought to work together."[33]

The most spectacular instances of this collaboration occurred in the visual arts, not in music, and took the form of Soviet propaganda posters and placards designed by the most advanced—"futurist," "suprematist," "constructivist"—painters and photographers of the day, like Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935), Lazar (El) Lissitsky (1890–1941), and Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956). At the Exposition Internationale des Arts

Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes (International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts) in 1925—the event from which the term "art-deco" was derived—the Soviet contingent made a colossal impression on viewers and critics in Paris, the very nerve center of international modernism.

Amazed by it, Sergey Diaghilev commissioned from one of the Soviet artists exhibited there, Georgiy Bogdanovich Yakulov (1884–1928), a "constructivist" set for a ballet, to be composed by Prokofieff, that would celebrate Soviet industrialization. The cacophonous work that emerged from this collaboration, *Le pas d'acier* ("The leap of steel," 1928), was best seen in its Parisian modernist context as an exercise in "radical chic." (Stravinsky, from whose *The Rite of Spring* it poached a bit, but who was by then completely cold to Russia and to primitivism, declared that it made him ill.) But it gave Prokofieff specious reassurance that the atmosphere back home would be hospitable to his work, and was one of the first nudges in the direction of his eventual return to Russia.

With one exception, however, the early Soviet musical scene was devoid of a real avant-garde. And that is because, owing to a combination of powerful patronage incentives and a strong educational establishment, there had been virtually no musical avant-garde to speak of in the immediate prerevolutionary period, with Scriabin prematurely dead and Stravinsky already living abroad. Not even Prokofieff, conservatory-trained and proud of it, was truly an avant-garde artist. His technique, like Stravinsky's or Scriabin's, may have been "advanced" by conservatory standards, but it was elite, highly professionalized, and, like all maximalism, committed to extending a tradition. That implies loyalty to the tradition one is extending, even if one is extending it to the point of "decadence." An avant-garde is something else. The term is military, and it implies belligerence: countercultural hostility, antagonism to existing institutions and traditions. That was indeed the fear among traditional artists, no matter how advanced, in the aftermath of the revolution. It seemed at first inevitable that a "workers' and peasants'" government would be hostile to the art institutions of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, which had harbored the art of what Lenin called the "bored upper ten thousand."[34] It seemed to elite establishmentarians that the handwriting was on the wall, and they left—the Rachmaninoffs and the Prokofieffs alike.

But if Prokofieff was no true revolutionary in art, neither, it turned out, were Lenin or Lunacharsky. They too were committed traditionalists in art. On reflection that should not be surprising since, although the Soviet government was set up in the name of the workers and the peasants, the revolution that produced it was led not "from below" by workers or peasants but "from above," by the descendents of the urban intelligentsia, whose tastes were formed within the social class from which they had emerged. In a famous conversation with the German Communist Clara Zetkin, Lenin had no hesitation in proclaiming himself a philistine with respect to modern art movements, and even derided the sentiment Lunacharsky expressed to Prokofieff. "We are good revolutionaries," he said, "but somehow we feel obliged to prove that we are on a par with 'contemporary culture.' But I have the courage to declare myself a 'barbarian.' I am unable to count the works of expressionism, futurism, cubism, and similar 'isms' among the highest manifestations of creative genius. I do not understand them. I do not derive any pleasure from them."[35] If Lenin had gone on to say that therefore the art of the traditional high culture was corrupt and had to be replaced with a proletarian culture, he would have qualified as an avant-gardist. But he said nothing of the kind. In fact, he said, "We must preserve the beautiful, take it as a model, use it as a starting point, even if it is 'old.' Why must we bow low in front of the new, as if it were God, only because it is 'new'?" That traditionalism, under the paradoxical (or hypocritical) cover of revolutionary rhetoric, would later be canonized in the doctrine of socialist realism.

But during the 1920s, the period of the so-called New Economic Policy (a limited free-market economy that Lenin reintroduced in 1921 and that lasted until 1929), a genuine Soviet avant-garde emerged. In 1923, two major professional associations of musicians were organized on the initiative of their memberships. One, the Association of Contemporary Music (called the ASM after its Russian initials) comprised the traditional establishment, including the traditional modernists. Its leading creative figure, Nikolai Yakovlevich Myaskovsky (1881–1950), became the Soviet "classicist" par excellence with twenty-seven symphonies and thirteen string quartets to his credit. Its fierce and frightening adversary, the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), was the Soviet avant-garde. Militantly countercultural, hopelessly doctrinaire, intolerant, self-righteous, these radical proletarians (and not the Soviet government) were the ones who wanted to throw out all sophisticated traditions and build the new Soviet music on the rubble.

RAPM defined itself by what it opposed: it was antimodernist, anti-Western, and anti-jazz, but also anti-folklore and antinationalist in the spirit of Marxist internationalism. In place of all existing classical, popular, and folk music (except revolutionary songs and a few works of Beethoven, the "voice of the French revolution") RAPM proffered revolutionary utilitarian music—what in "new-objective" Germany would have been called *Gebrauchsmusik*: mainly marchlike "mass songs" for group singing, set to agitational propaganda (*agitprop*) lyrics. For six years ASM and RAPM contended, until in 1929 the NEP came to an end and the country entered its harsh totalitarian phase with the inauguration of the first Five Year Plan. As part of the general centralization of authority now imposed, RAPM was given administrative control over Soviet musical institutions.

This was the period during which the Moscow Conservatory was renamed the Felix Kon School of Higher Musical Education, after a firebrand politician of the period who edited the newspaper *Rabochaya gazeta*, The Workers' Gazette. A nonmusician, Boleslaw Przybyszewski, the doctrinaire Marxist son of a famous symbolist writer, was installed as rector. Myaskovsky, together with Reinhold Glière (1875–1956) and Mikhail Gnesin (1883–1957), his fellow stalwarts of the prerevolutionary creative elite, were denounced and fired from the faculty. Grades and examinations were abolished, and admission restricted to students of acceptable class background. Composers were exhorted to spurn all styles and genres that had flourished under the tsars. The only politically correct concept of authorship was collective, epitomized in the so-called Prokoll, a group of Moscow Conservatory students who banded together to produce revolutionary operas and oratorios that were in essence medleys of mass songs.

The joyous declaration after three years of a prematurely successful completion to the first Five Year Plan was the Soviet (now firmly Stalinist) leadership's way of retreating from a ruinous situation without admitting error. The country was in misery—a misery that could be blamed on local administrators and "wreckers" in the case of the real tragedies like forced collectivization of agriculture, in which millions had died as a result of mass starvation tactics. This was the beginning of the era of Soviet "show trials," in which scapegoats were subjected to orchestrated campaigns of denunciation and coerced confessions that deflected popular discontent away from the real culprits, the economic planners themselves and their enforcers. On the artistic and intellectual fronts, all excesses were blamed on "left deviationism" from the true Party line.

The same Party that installed the proletarianists in 1929 suppressed them in 1932 in the name of a benign administrative *perestroyka* or "restructuring." The RAPM and its sister organizations in the other arts were "liquidated," along with ASM, and replaced by the all-encompassing creative unions. The RAPMists were stripped of power and forced to make public recantations. Nominal power reverted to the old guard, from whose standpoint the 1932 *perestroyka* meant salvation from chaos and obscurantism. The grateful old conservatory professors were given back their classrooms and installed as willing figureheads in the organizational structure of the Composers' Union. To all appearances, the union was a service organization, even a fraternal club.

The real power, of course, lay elsewhere, and the real purpose of the organization, though this was not immediately apparent, was to be a conduit of centralized authority and largesse. As the guarantor of its members' right to work, as the channeler of state patronage through commissions, and as dispenser of material assistance, the union was ostensibly engaged in protecting the interests of composers, but by the same token it was implicitly endowed with the power to enforce conformity. Its chief social functions were the so-called internal *pokazï*—meetings at which composers submitted their work in progress to comradely peer review in the spirit of idealistic "Bolshevik self-criticism," and open forums at which composers and musical intellectuals shared the floor discussing topics like Soviet opera or "symphonism" for eventual publication in *Sovetskaya muzïka* (Soviet Music), the union's official organ.

Early discussions of Socialist Realism and the problems of its application to music, the least inherently "realistic" of the arts, were also carried by the journal. As in the case of literature and the fine arts, the nature of the doctrine was fully revealed in its application rather than its theory. It turned out to have far less to do with Marxist socialism than with more traditional Russian attitudes to the arts, particularly those associated most recently with the Christian doctrines of Count Leo Tolstoy, and more remotely with the doctrine of official nationalism that was promulgated a round century before in the early reign of Tsar Nikolai I.

It may seem bizarre to trace a militantly atheistic ideology like Socialist Realism back to a militant Christian thinker, but their common militancy, and their shared contempt for "art for art's sake," provided the link. In his tract *What Is Art?* (1898), Tolstoy asserted that all art must contain the Good and the Important. If these are present, a work of art is "moral" and satisfies one of Tolstoy's three criteria for consideration as art, the others being intelligibility and sincerity. Tolstoy defined the Good as "that which is always necessary to all people,"[36] namely "feeling that can unite people with God and with one another."[37] The Important, for Tolstoy, was "that which causes people to understand and to love what previously they did not understand or love."[38] Thus, in order to deserve its existence and dissemination, art must be communitarian, didactic, and comprehensible to all.

Modernism, socially divisive and "elitist," is immediately excluded. Substitute the words Socialist for Christian, Socialism for Christianity, political for religious, and the following passage from Tolstoy could easily have issued from the pen of a Gorky, a Lunacharsky, or a Lenin:

> The art of our time should be appraised differently from former art chiefly in this, that the art of our time, that is, Christian art (basing itself on a religious perception which demands the union of man), excludes, from the domain of art good in subject-matter, everything transmitting exclusive feelings which do not unite men but divide them. It relegates such work to the category of art that is bad in its subject-matter; while on the other hand it includes in the category of art that is good in subject-matter a section not formerly admitted as deserving of selection and respect, namely, universal art transmitting even the most trifling and simple feelings if only they are accessible to all men without exception, and therefore unite them. Such art cannot but be esteemed good in our time, for it attains the end which Christianity, the religious perception of our time, sets before humanity.[39]

Here in embryo is the essence of Socialist Realism as expressed by a trio of terms that was fashioned by Zhdanov as if expressly to echo the trio—*pravoslaviye* (Orthodoxy), *samoderzhaviye* (autocracy), *narodnost'* (nationality)—that had characterized Russian official nationalism a century before. The last term, *narodnost',* remained the same. Like the earlier concept, Socialist Realism demanded that art be rooted in folklore, or at least in styles familiar and meaningful to all without special preparation. The other terms were *partiynost'* and *ideynost'.* The former means loyalty to the Communist Party and conformity with its official line—which, though it claimed to be a stable point of political and moral reference, proved to be as changeable as the weather, and therefore dangerous to artists. The latter term, *ideynost',* means "being full of ideas," which in practice amounted to a requirement that works of art have a content that is easily grasped and paraphrased.

This last was a difficult demand to enforce in the case of textless music. The difficulty had two consequences. At times it led to the catastrophic downgrading of the instrumental genres in the Soviet scheme of musical value. At other times it led to theorizing the means whereby the ideological content of instrumental music could be rendered "objectively" intelligible (and therefore censorable). The chief theorizer was Boris Asafyev (1884–1949), a mediocre composer but a brilliant musicologist, in a book called *Muzïkal'naya forma kak protsess* ("Musical form as process"), first issued in 1930 and continually reworked and reissued as Asafyev refined his thinking according to changing political demands.

Asafyev theorized that instrumental music contained semantic units comparable to what linguists call morphemes—minimal bearers of meaning. Asafyev's term for his musical morphemes was "intonation" (*intonatsiya*); in combination, intonations produced musical "imagery" (*obraznost'*) that could be verbally paraphrased just as iconographical codes might be invoked to translate the meaning of a painting into words. Ironically enough, these formulations of Asafyev's were all adaptations of theories associated with "Russian formalism," a school of criticism that flourished in the 1920s, which interpreted works of literature "semiotically" (according, that is, to a "sign language" of tacit codes and signaling "devices" that made form as meaningful as content). Formalism as a literary practice was officially banned as modernist in the 1930s; indeed the very word "formalist" became an all-purpose and much dreaded term of Stalinist abuse. But as adapted by Asafyev (not, originally, with any political purpose in mind), and called by another name, it remained viable for music, because it could in principle help render instrumental music policeable.

Notes:

(31) Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875).

(32) Quoted from Yuriy M. Keldïsh, et al., eds., *Muzïkal'naya èntsiklopediya*, Vol. V (Moscow: Sovetskaya èntsiklopediya, 1981), p. 226.

(33) Sergey Prokofieff, *Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.), p. 50.

(34) V. I. Lenin, "Party Organization and Party Literature" (1905), in *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 151.

(35) Klara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1929), p. 14.

(36) Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art? and Essays on Art*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 55.

(37) *Ibid.*, p. 240.

(38) *Ibid.*, p. 55.

(39) *Ibid.*, p. 241.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Dmitriy Shostakovich

The Nose

Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District

PROTAGONIST OR VICTIM?

Chapter: CHAPTER 13 Music and Totalitarian Society
Source: MUSIC IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

So much for theory. The story of Stalinist totalitarianism in practice, where music was concerned, can best be told—in fact, in some ways can *only* be told—in terms of the creative biography of Dmitriy Dmitriyevich Shostakovich (1906–75), the Soviet Union's emblematic composer. Shostakovich was the one composer wholly formed in the Soviet Union to achieve unquestionable world eminence. In that sense his work was not only regarded, but was actively promoted by the regime, as an emblem of Soviet cultural achievement and a vindication of the theory of socialist realism. His actual biography, containing as it did dramatic collisions and painful compromises with Soviet authority, is emblematic in another way, symbolizing the plight of artists who are subject to direct political control under uniquely modern conditions. And the controversies that have swirled about his legacy since his death (and especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union) are emblematic in yet a third way, exemplifying the contests over the meaning of art to which conditions of censorship and political manipulation inevitably give rise.

fig. 13-8 Dmitriy Shostakovich at a rehearsal of Vladimir Mayakovsky's *Bedbug* in Leningrad, 1929. Seated beside the composer is the director Vsevolod Meyerhold. Standing behind are (left) the designer, Alexander Rodchenko; and (right) Mayakovsky.

Shostakovich was a composing prodigy. He became nationally famous at the age of nineteen, when his First Symphony, his conservatory graduation piece, was publicly performed in Leningrad (the former Russian capital, St. Petersburg, renamed in honor of Lenin) on 12 May 1926. (Shostakovich celebrated the date for the rest of his life as a personal holiday.) World fame followed less than a year later, when Bruno Walter performed the symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra on 5 May 1927. The American premiere, by Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra, took place in November 1928. By then Shostakovich had won international recognition as a pianist as well, receiving a prize at the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw.

The precocious symphony, very much a sign of its times, shows Shostakovich to have been well abreast of all the fashionable currents in European music. In form it was impeccably "neoclassical," while in content it was full of "new-objective" irony in its allusions to "subartistic" or utilitarian genres and its sarcastic tendency to take things to laughable expressive extremes. The first and second themes in the opening movement, for example, are a cheeky military march and a shyly coquettish waltz. The second movement, nominally a scherzo and trio, contrasts a maniacal galop (in which the piano takes a leading part) with some sort of weirdly antiquated hymn or ersatz medieval organum. The finale, another galop (or possibly a circus march), brazenly and explicitly mocks the pathos of the affecting slow movement—and implicitly mocks the listener who had been taken in by it. The main sentiment of *neue Sachlichkeit*—"We won't be fooled again!"—is written all over this icily brilliant score.

The piano's conspicuous mischief-making in the second and fourth movements is perhaps a reminder of the composer's apprenticeship, during the hard days following the Bolshevik coup and the ensuing civil war, as low-paid pianist in a cold silent movie theater, where he may have acquired his lifelong taste for satirical intrusions of "low" genres, and for abrupt quasi-cinematic "cuts" in lieu of smooth transitions, to undermine the dignity of classical instrumental forms. His keen insolence seems to reflect that of early Soviet society, which saw itself very much as a buoyantly renewed culture injecting vigor into a decadent world.

Shostakovich's early satirical vein reached a peak in his first opera, *The Nose*, on which he embarked in the summer of 1927 and finished a year later, aged twenty-one. It is based on a famously hilarious but inscrutable tale by the novelist Nikolai Gogol (1809–52), in which a pompous civil servant awakens one morning to find that his nose has left his face; later he encounters his nose gallivanting around the city in a uniform that outranks his own. By the end of the opera all St. Petersburg is chasing after the nose, which is apprehended, beaten back to its normal size, and returned to its owner, who tries in vain to affix it to his face, but wakes up the next day to find it has returned there of its own accord. The story can support any number of interpretations ranging from the sexual to the political to the religious. The opera attempts none at all, aping Gogol's own deadpan (or "objective") manner and leaving the task of "reading" to others—another lifelong habit of the composer's.

Policeman: Come here, kind sir.
Barber (*spoken*): I wish your lordship good health.
Policeman: No! No! My good fellow, I'm no lordship; tell me, though, what were you doing standing by the river?
Barber: I swear, guv'nor, I was on my way to give a shave and just looked down to see how fast the river was going.
Policeman: You're lying, yes you're lying, and you won't get away with it. Please be so kind as to answer.
Barber: I'll gladly shave your grace twice or even three times a week — without the slightest demur.
— Trans. R.T.

ex. 13-6 Dmitriy Shostakovich, *The Nose* in vocal score, end of Act I, scene 2

Instead, the music seeks out every conceivable opportunity to underscore Gogol's extravagant sense of the absurd. Toward the end of the second scene in act I, for example, a policeman, grotesquely cast as a tenor falsettist (as close to a castrato as a twentieth-century composer could come) and incongruously accompanied by an ensemble of balalaikas (a folk instrument entirely out of place in an urban street scene), tries to apprehend a barber, who has discovered the nose in a freshly baked roll and is trying to dispose of it (Ex. 13-6). The stage is abruptly plunged in darkness, and an entr'acte ensues that has become famous as perhaps the earliest example in modern music of a composition scored entirely for unpitched percussion instruments. (It was often performed as a separate piece, and is included as one of the movements in an instrumental suite Shostakovich extracted from the opera after its 1930 premiere; among other claimants to patent-office primacy is the all-percussion scherzo from the First Symphony by another young Russian composer, Alexander Tcherepnin, also composed in 1927 and actually performed earlier than *The Nose*.)

The curtain goes up on the third scene to find Kovalyov, the civil servant, asleep in bed. He gets up to wash and sees his noseless face in the mirror. His "cavatina" (Ex. 13-7), consisting of nothing but grunts and gargles, is a pointed satirical counterpart to the tuneless percussion entr'acte. The whole opera burlesques the conventions of the genre in a similarly broad, unsubtle yet impressively inventive manner. More than any other composer of the time, perhaps, the young Shostakovich comes across as someone out to debunk and discredit the musical status quo from within. It was at the time an authentically and typically "Soviet" attitude toward "bourgeois" traditions.

The radical proletarianists (RAPMists) opposed Shostakovich's opera, for it still honored those traditions "in the breach," displayed elite virtuosity in its composing, and demanded a sophisticated audience for its appreciation. Once in power they managed to get the work taken off the boards, not to be revived until the

1960s. But their opposition was as yet a factional, not an official one. Until the end of his third decade, Shostakovich was regarded everywhere as the brash young musical genius of a brash young society, thriving in the din of its social upheavals, and pampered by its artistic elite.

ex. 13-7 Dmitriy Shostakovich, *The Nose* in vocal score, Act I, scene 3, Kovalyov's "cavatina"

Like most Soviet artists, Shostakovich greeted the 1932 *perestroyka*, which removed RAPM from the scene, as a great boon. His confidence restored, he embarked on another opera. This one was based on another famous nineteenth-century novella, but a serious one: *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* by Nikolai Leskov (1831–95), not a fantastical writer like Gogol but an adherent of the naturalist school. It is the story of Katerina Izmailova, a childless merchant's wife in the middle of the great Russian nowhere, who rebels against her patriarchal surroundings by murdering her husband, her father-in-law, and her husband's saintly nephew. She and her lover, Sergey, are discovered in the act of killing the little boy and sentenced to exile in Siberia. On the way there, Sergey takes a shine to another woman, whom Katerina duly murders by jumping with her into a freezing river in which both of them drown.

fig. 13-9 Shostakovich, *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, act I, scene 2.

Shostakovich and his librettist Alexander Preys (with whom he had collaborated on *The Nose* as well) tried to turn Leskov's creepy "sketch" of ungovernable passion and mayhem into a Soviet morality play. The objective conditions under which Katerina was forced to live, they argued in a program essay, justified her acts of violence. They were presented not as crimes but as acts of liberation. (Still, the third murder had to be eliminated because, as Shostakovich put it in the program, "killing a child always makes a bad impression.")[40] By emphasizing Katerina's awakened libido as her motivation, moreover, Shostakovich and Preys purported to turn her into a feminist icon. Shostakovich announced the opera as the first in a trilogy that would glorify Russian womankind, first as rebel against the tsarist order, then as revolutionary, finally as the fully emancipated and productive heroine of Soviet society.

As befitted its loftier if morally distorted theme, Shostakovich's music balanced his earlier satirical manner against a more lyrical and conventionally beautiful idiom. The latter he reserved for Katerina, the former for her victims, so that the dubious heroine of this very inhumane opera becomes the only character with whom it is possible for the audience to identify as a human being. Katerina's is the only music in the opera that has emotional "life," as traditionally (that is, romantically) portrayed. It waxes and wanes; it has rhythmic and dynamic flexibility; it reaches climaxes. All the other characters are portrayed as subhuman. Their singing and, above all, their movements are accompanied by trudging or galloping ostinatos whose inflexible pulsations characterize them as soulless, insensate automatons, comic-strip creatures incapable of experiencing or evoking an emotional response.

The technique of dehumanizing victims operates most effectively in the crucial fifth scene of the opera, which depicts the murder of Katerina's husband, a well-meaning, ineffectual chap who (unlike his father) has done her no harm. The scene opens with Katerina in bed with Sergey, surrounded by the opera's lushest, most lyrical orchestral music. The mood lasts until the husband's offstage approach, signaled by a typical "trudging" ostinato. Once he arrives on stage, the trudge gives way to one of Shostakovich's signature galops. The whole scene of confrontation and murder is played against its unremitting oompah (Ex. 13-8).

ex. 13-8 Dmitriy Shostakovich, *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, **Act I, scene 5**

When this scene has been performed abroad, many have found it puzzling. The American composer Elliott Carter, who saw *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* in Berlin, wrote that "the relation of the music to the action is unaccountable," since he could not imagine why Shostakovich would have "the heroine and her lover strangle her husband on a large stage-sized four-poster bed to a lively dance tune."[41] Within the semiotic codes of socialist realism, however, the reason is clear enough: the dance tune is there to dehumanize the husband and mitigate the heroine's crime to one of cruelty to animals at worst. What condemns him is nothing more than his being part of Katerina's hated environment. He is dehumanized and dispatched not for anything he has done but for what he is: a beneficiary of the social system that oppressed his wife, or in Marxian terms, a "class enemy." That is enough "objectively" to justify his liquidation. And all of this is conveyed, as in any successful opera, by the music, read through its appropriate codes by a properly attuned audience.

The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District was a huge success with audiences and critics alike after its nearly simultaneous premieres in Leningrad, the composer's hometown, and Moscow, the Soviet capital, in January

of 1934. It played to full houses for two years and toured the Western world as well, where, if it was not understood quite the way it was understood at home, it nevertheless captivated audiences, as *Wozzeck* did, with its strong doses of sex and violence. (The scene in which Sergey rapes Katerina—musically quite similar to the murder scene—became especially famous when a New York critic, quoted later in a national news magazine, dubbed it an exercise in "pornophony.") [42] No one foresaw its now emblematic fate.

In January 1936, a festival of Soviet music was held in Moscow. The Little Opera Theater of Leningrad lent its two most successful productions to Moscow's Bolshoi Theater for the occasion. One was *Quiet Flows the Don*, a corny "song opera" (a uniquely Soviet genre somewhat similar to a Broadway musical but sung throughout) by a hack named Ivan Dzerzhinsky, which was based on Mikhail Sholokhov's famous novel of the postrevolutionary civil war. The other was *Lady Macbeth*. On the evening of January 17, Stalin attended a performance of Dzerzhinsky's opera in the company of a close aide, and, in the words of an official press communiqué, called the composer, the conductor, and the director to his box, where he "gave a positive assessment of the theater's efforts on behalf of Soviet opera and noted the considerable ideological and political merits of the production." [43] On the evening of January 26, Stalin returned to the theater, together with a somewhat larger entourage that included Andrey Zhdanov, to see *Lady Macbeth*. Shostakovich, alerted by telegram, was in the audience. He left the theater perturbed (as he wrote to a friend) about "what had happened to Dzerzhinsky, and what didn't happen to me." [44] For Stalin and his retinue had left without comment before the end. Two days later, what soon became known all over the Soviet Union as the Historic Document appeared in *Pravda*, the Soviet Communist Party's official organ. It was an unsigned editorial titled "Muddle Instead of Music," and a historic document it was indeed. At a time when newspaper campaigns were already rife against the "left deviationism" of old Bolsheviks in preparation for the show trials and mass executions that were then in the planning stage, the same merciless rhetoric of political denunciation was leveled, for the first time anywhere, at an artist.

The opera was excoriated both for its libretto and its music. The main thrust of the invective was puritanical: no surprise, since totalitarian regimes fear nothing so much as an unleashed libido. "The music croaks and hoots and snorts and pants in order to represent love scenes as naturally as possible," *Pravda* fumed; "and 'love,' in its most vulgar form is smeared all over the opera." [45] That, the editorial insinuated, was why the opera had enjoyed its sensational international success. It was a capitulation to "the depraved tastes of bourgeois audiences," whom it titillated with its "witching, clamorous, neurasthenic music." But then the attack turned from the opera's subject to its style. "The composer," *Pravda* ranted, "seems to have deliberately encoded his music, twisted all its sounds so that it would appeal only to aesthetes and formalists who have lost all healthy tastes." And now came the threat. "Left deviationism in opera grows out of the same source as left deviationism in painting, in poetry, in pedagogy, in science," the newspaper asserted, using the very term that was a death sentence to political losers. In a phrase that must have scared the poor composer half out of his wits, the chief organ of Soviet power denounced him for "trifling with difficult matters," and hinted that "it might end very badly."

Lady Macbeth, until then the jewel of the Soviet operatic stage, was summarily banned, not to return until 1961, in a revised version stripped of pornophony (but also with an expanded final scene depicting the convoy en route to Siberia, which many read as Shostakovich's oblique reference to the threats he had endured). The premiere of Shostakovich's monumental Fourth Symphony was canceled on its very eve. (It would not be performed until 1962.) There have been many attempts to find a rationale for these bans on the basis of musical content, or on that of Stalinist taste (or even the personal taste of the dictator, who had been a seminarian in his youth and perhaps retained a prospective clergyman's squeamishness about sex).

It is more likely that Shostakovich was singled out for attack not because his works gave particular offense, but because of his preeminence among the Soviet composers of his generation. If Shostakovich could be summarily silenced and brought low, then nobody was safe. It was a demonstration of the omnipotence of Soviet power over the arts in the wake of the 1932 *perestroyka*, which by dissolving all musical institutions not directly administered by the government at the behest of the Party, removed all impediments to the exercise of Stalin's arbitrary rule.

Some of Shostakovich's surviving friends have stated since his death that at the time of the *Pravda* editorial

the composer fully expected to be arrested and imprisoned, and packed a suitcase. That never happened, but for the rest of his life, or at least until the end of Stalin's reign, he had to live with the threat of a "bad end." That this tortured figure continued to function as an artist and a citizen has lent his career, and many of his works, a heroic luster that no "benignly neglected" modernist composer in the West can hope to rival.

Notes:

(40) Dmitri Shostakovich, "Moyo ponimaniye 'Ledi Makbet,' " in *Ledi Makbet Mtsenskogo uyezda: Opera D. D. Shostakovicha* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennïy Akademicheskiy Malïy Opernïy Teatr, 1934), p. 6.

(41) Elliott Carter, "Current Chronicle: Germany, 1960," *Musical Quarterly* XLVI (1960); *The Writings of Elliott Carter*, eds. Else Stone and Kurt Stone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 213.

(42) "The Murders of Mtsensk," *Time*, 11 February 1935, p. 35.

(43) "Beseda tovarishchey Stalina i Molotova s avtorami opernogo spektaklya 'Tikhiy Don,' " *Sovetskaya muzïka* IV, no. 2 (1936): 3.

(44) Shostakovich to Ivan Sollertinsky, 28 January 1936; quoted in Lyudmila Mikheyeva, "Istoriya odnoy druzhbï," *Sovetskaya muzïka* LV, no. 9 (1987): 79.

(45) "Sumbur vmesto muzïki," *Pravda*, 28 January 1936.

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Shostakovich: Posthumous reputation

READINGS

Chapter: CHAPTER 13 Music and Totalitarian Society
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Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The first work to be so regarded, the Fifth Symphony, was also the work that won Shostakovich his rehabilitation and return to official favor. It was first performed in Leningrad, on 21 November 1937, at the very height of Stalin's so-called "purge" of the Party and government, in the midst of mass arrests, disappearances, and executions, to an audience that, according to reliable reports, had been weeping openly during the slow movement and cheered the symphony for fully half an hour when it was over. The history of its reception is a most revealing narrative, not only in the context of Soviet music, but in the more general context of music created, presented, and interpreted under conditions of modern totalitarianism at its most stringent.

The most conspicuous difference between the Fifth Symphony and its composer's earlier works is the total suppression of the satirical mode, formerly one of Shostakovich's most distinctive features. The scherzo, where formerly one might have expected a madcap caricature of a march or galop, was a rather heavy, traditionally Germanic (hence "classical") triple-metered affair—perhaps a waltz, perhaps a *Ländler*, perhaps even a somewhat cloddish minuet—in an idiom seemingly derived from that of Mahler's early symphonies (particularly the First, in which the scherzo shares the key of D major with that of Shostakovich's Fifth). The change was noted with satisfaction by the critic for *Sovetskaya muzïka*, who approvingly contrasted the scherzo's "new traits of fresh, hearty humor, naivety, and even tenderness" with Shostakovich's previous "pretentious urbanity," his "flaunting of cheap effects."[46] The work was taken on high as a recantation. The composer, at least outwardly, sought (or allowed himself to appear to seek) to abet the impression. The very "iffy" language is necessary since no public utterance by a public figure in Stalinist Russia can be presumed actually to come from its ostensible source. In the present case the utterance took the form of a newspaper article called "My Creative Answer," which was published in a Moscow newspaper on the eve of the Symphony's premiere in the capital, 25 January 1938. The author of the article announced that in the wake of the Leningrad premiere, "among the often very substantial responses that have analyzed this work, one that particularly gratified me said that 'the Fifth Symphony is a Soviet artist's practical creative answer to just criticism.'" He went on to state that "at the center of the work's conception I envisioned *a man* in all his suffering," and that "the Symphony's finale resolves the tense and tragic moments of the preceding movements in a joyous, optimistic fashion."

That man, the Symphony's hero, is explicitly identified with the composer and his recent past: "If I have really succeeded in embodying in musical images all that I have thought and felt since the critical articles in *Pravda*, if the demanding listener will detect in my music a turn toward greater clarity and simplicity, I will be satisfied."[47] In keeping with the explicit demands of Socialist Realism, a special effort was made to dissociate the Symphony's "tense and tragic moments" from any hint of "pessimism," an impermissible message for art to convey since it promoted passivity and low productivity. "I think that Soviet tragedy, as a genre, has every right to exist," the author of the article published over Shostakovich's name declared,

> *but*: its content must be suffused with a *positive idea*, comparable, for example, to the life-affirming ardor of Shakespeare's tragedies. In the literature of music we are likewise familiar with many inspired pages in which, for example, the severe images of suffering in Verdi's or Mozart's Requiems

manage to arouse not weakness or despair in the human spirit but courage and the will to fight.

The official press, which may have actually authored this interpretation of the symphony, naturally accepted it at its face value, even if some of the stricter critics, like the one in *Sovetskaya muzïka*, faulted Shostakovich for occasionally falling short of his intentions as set forth in "My Creative Answer." The slow movement, which had provoked the epidemic of weeping in the hall, was a failure, in the critic's view, because instead of arousing "courage and the will to fight," it seemed to depict instead a state of "torpor, numbness, a condition of spiritual prostration, in which the will is annihilated along with the strength to resist or overcome. This numbness, this torpor is the very *negation* of the life-affirming principle."[48] And it would have made the Symphony unacceptable, one feels after reading the review, had not the finale saved the day—or tried to—by breaking the objectionable mood, and especially with its insistently, earsplittingly yea-saying D major coda (Ex. 13-9). The critic ended his review with cautious approval, but with a question in his mind: had Shostakovich truly succeeded in dispelling the torpor he so vividly portrayed (and possibly conveyed) in the Largo?

ex. 13-9 Dmitri Shostakovich, Symphony no. 5, IV, coda

With that, the critic unwittingly (or—who knows?—perhaps wittingly) signaled the real story of the Fifth's reception, in which the official reading contended with a sort of folk tradition of "dissident" readings that put the symphony's supposed message in quite another light. This tradition, carried on in private (or in coded language), has to be pieced together from scattered documents and reminiscences, beginning with a notation that Alexander Fadeyev, the very orthodox head of the Soviet Writers' Union, made in his diary after hearing the 1938 Moscow premiere and published posthumously, in 1957: "A work of astonishing strength. The third movement is beautiful. But the ending does not sound like a resolution (still less like a triumph or victory), but rather like a punishment or vengeance on someone. A terrible emotional force, but a tragic force. It arouses painful feelings."[49]

This turned the official reading on its head, judging most successful the very movement that the official critic had called the least, and hinting that the finale may have "failed" on purpose. Myaskovsky, writing to Prokofieff (who was traveling abroad), confessed that he was surprised that Shostakovich could have come up with a finale so "utterly flat,"[50] and Yevgeniy Mravinsky, the conductor of the Leningrad premiere, wrote

much later that despite the composer's "great effort to make the finale the authentic confirmation of an objectively affirmative conclusion," the confirmation was unconvincing since it was achieved by transparently artificial means: "Somewhere in the middle of the movement the quick tempo spends itself and the music seemingly leans against some sort of obstacle, following which the composer leads it out of the cul-de-sac, subjecting it to a big dynamic buildup, applying an 'induction coil'"[51] —that is, an externally administered electric shock.

Were these writers using code? And was even Georgiy Khubov, the "official critic," using code when he called such insistent attention to the slow movement's "torpor"? By now a whole library of late- and post-Soviet memoirs, accounts by émigrés, and clandestinely published dissident writings attests that that was precisely the mood that reigned among the populace during the political terror—the "Yezhovshchina," as it was called, after Nikolai Yezhov, the commissar who directed it—whose very peak coincided with the symphony's premiere. The Russian poet Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966) used that very word—torpor (*otsepeneniye*)—in the prose preface to her poem "Requiem" (composed and memorized at the time, committed to paper and published after Stalin's death) to characterize the endless queues of women who gathered daily at the prisons of Leningrad to learn the fates of their arrested loved ones:

> In the terrible years of the Yezhovshchina I spent seventeen months in the Leningrad prison lines. One day someone "fingered" me. Then the blue-lipped woman standing behind me, who of course had never heard my name, roused herself out of the torpor we all shared and whispered in my ear (for everyone there spoke in whispers): "But can you describe this?" And I said, "I can." Then something like a smile slid across what had once been her face.

There are many now, both in and out of Russia, who believe that Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony was a similar act of witness. In 1979, four years after the composer's death, a book called *Testimony* was published in New York, purporting to be memoirs of Shostakovich as transcribed from conversations with an émigré journalist named Solomon Volkov. It contains this unequivocal characterization of the symphony that had once been called Shostakovich's creative response to just criticism:

> I think it is clear to everyone what happens in the Fifth. The rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as in [the first scene of Musorgsky's opera] *Boris Godunov*. It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, "Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing," and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, "Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing." What kind of apotheosis is that? You have to be a complete oaf not to hear that.[52]

The authenticity of *Testimony* has been seriously questioned, but in the end it is not relevant to the point at issue here, which is the way in which the folk reading has triumphed, both in Russia and abroad, over the official one as Soviet power grew weaker and eventually collapsed. We may never know what Shostakovich intended, but (as is always the case with instrumental music) multiple readings were available to listeners despite all attempts to control interpretation by means of Socialist Realism, and those who wished to believe in the work's dissident message had a consolation that was otherwise unavailable under conditions of Soviet censorship. And that is why nowhere on earth was symphonic music ever valued more highly by multitudes of listeners than in the Soviet Union.

That high social value was purchased at an exorbitant price in suffering, one that neither the composer nor his audience, given the choice, might willingly have paid. But it illustrates more poignantly, perhaps, than any other episode in the history of music just what it is that has made music so special among the arts. It was something that the Romantics had valued in all art. As early as 1794, when the idea of the esthetic was in its infancy, the German poet Friedrich Schiller observed that "the real and express content that the poet puts into his work remains always finite; the possible content that he allows us to contribute is an infinite quality."[53] But it was a quality that, inevitably, became especially associated with the art that had the least, or most weakly specified, semantic content. A century and a half later, in a country and a society undreamt of by Schiller, the truth of his statement received its greatest validation when it allowed the formerly sarcastic, "objective" and often somewhat trivial music of a chastened and newly serious Dmitriy Shostakovich to

become the secret diary of a nation.

Notes:

(46) This and following quotations from Georgiy Khubov, "5-ya simfoniya D. Shostakovicha," *Sovetskaya muzïka* VI, no. 3 (1938): 16.

(47) "Moy tvorcheskiy otvet," *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 25 January 1938, p. 30.

(48) Khubov, "5-ya simfoniya," p. 22.

(49) Alexander Fadeyev, *Za tridtsat' let* (Moscow: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1957), quoted in *Dmitriy Shostakovich*, eds. G. Ordzhonikidze et al. (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1967), p. 43.

(50) S. S. Prokofieff and N. Ya. Myaskovsky, *Perepiska* (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1977), p. 455.

(51) "Tridtsat' let s muzïkoy Shostakovicha," in Ordzhonikidze, et al., *Dmitriy Shostakovich*, p. 109.

(52) *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as Related to and Edited by Solomon Volkov*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 183.

(53) Friedrich Schiller, review of Friedrich Mattheson's landscape poetry, quoted in Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 93.

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