BERG AND WEBERN—SCHÖNBERG'S HEIRS

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THE dimension which the development of Arnold Schönberg's style follows, is depth rather than breadth. Not that he has ever lacked abundance of natural gifts as the abstract programmatist would have us believe. On the contrary: no other man living has such riches at his disposal; none has so completely utilized the elements of the composer's material—melody, and harmony, counterpoint and formal structure, orchestration and instrumental timbre. But all these elements are grasped and shaped from the center out. Thus they interpenetrate in a process of condensation which ruthlessly eliminates the possibilities of composition that lie on the periphery of his stylistic development and are not completely carried along in the main current of its flowing stream. Inexorably narrow is the bed of this stream, like a canyon dug through the flats of musical production. Not many of his works correspond to each logical step of his development, sometimes only one. When the possibility of a whole new music arises, he contents himself with presenting an outline as a sample, worked out once, in order that he may attack the new technical problems which grow out of it. Plans for complete works well on their way to conclusion vanish when the idea of the piece in question has been realized. Thus a piano quintet and a second great chamber symphony have remained unfinished.

This gives the work of his pupils functions incomparably more important than those of the Wagner epigones, who have nothing more to add to the extensive and richly repetitious music of their master. With Schönberg the creations of his followers is necessarily the stage on which his own are linked to the broad stretch of musical history. This is attested by their close adherence to his music; they owe him not a vague variety of style and technical means, but the strict basis of musical knowledge. At the same time he demands the greatest independence so that they may con-

cretely fulfill what he offers as a possibility, realizes but once, and which can survive only when their own substance fills in the outlines of his pattern.

Therefore it is not surprising that in the face of this double requirement of the most loyal discipleship and most resolute independence, there are very few who hold their ground. Though the pedagogue Schönberg has influenced musical creation today to a degree difficult to estimate, though he has trained a whole generation of conductors, few of his pupils have survived as composers. Only Berg and Webern remain, both but a decade younger than himself, both associated with him throughout their lives. They are in the strictest sense his pupils, and yet at the same time autonomous composers. If one adds to this generation Horwitz, perhaps, then from a wider circle, Jemnitz, of the younger ones Eisler, and more recently Zillich and Scalcottas, the number of the disciples of Schönberg seriously to be considered as composers, is exhausted. They all began in the closest relation with him, they obtained their independence not by freeing themselves from his style, but by following the demands which grew out of technical association with the master without worrying about their own "personality."

Berg and Webern represent the extreme poles of Schönberg's domain. Their development is oriented from single works by him, the problems of which each has extended to his own compositional landscape. Berg begins with the *Chamber Symphony,* Webern with the "released" style of Opus 11 to Opus 20. It should be pointed out here that the form of the "short" pieces, as it appears in Schönberg's piano work, Opus 19, and in the *Herzgewächsen,* was elaborated in its purest development first by Webern and only later by Schönberg himself. However this proves little since the technical problem of this style is already formulated in the last piano piece of Opus 11; on the other hand it is also found in the early works of Webern, as in the double canon, *Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen,* which is still written in a restricted tonality, and is found in the Webern pianissimo, tender, floating, a gentle monologue.

But to gain an insight into the style of Webern and Berg it is advisable not to begin with the question of independence, because

independence does not lie on the surface of style but in the secret depths of its content. The homogeneity which Berg and Webern share with Schönberg is determined by a common level of knowledge prescribing the radical patterning of all elements of composition, the shaping of which gives them common earmarks of style. Berg and Webern both may be said to present commentaries on Schönberg, and by reason of this are assured of a place in the totality of history. Berg unites him with Mahler on one hand and on the other with the great music drama and legitimizes him from this point. Webern pursues to its furthest extreme the subjectivism which Schönberg first released in ironic play in *Pierrot*. He is the only one to propound musical expressionism in its strictest sense, carrying it to such a point that it reverts of its own weight to a new objectivity. Neither excursion is bound to the work of the master; in actual creation the original nature of the interpreter comes to light, just as in the great commentaries of philosophical literature, those of Plato and Aristotle, for example, the personality of each author breaks through the text.

Berg's Opus 1, the *Piano Sonata*—which consists simply of a sonata movement without in the least embracing the many-movement scheme—appears at first glance to be a parergon to Schönberg's *Chamber Symphony*. The melody and harmony in fourths, the structural function of the whole-tone scale, even the transition theme point plainly in that direction. Deeper still is the connection between the inner construction of the piece and that of the *Chamber Symphony*. It presents short patterns and extends them by setting small variations one after the other. In this way the sonata form is permeated with the variation form and the development principle achieves complete primacy in the sonata. Nevertheless the differences are obvious. Not merely in a certain sweetness of the harmony which frequently imposes the whole-tone chord on major ninths and imparts greater significance to the ninth than Schönberg ever did, suggesting Debussy, Scriabin and even Reger. This harmonic sweetness, which at times frankly exploits the erotic Tristan quality, is not fortuitous. It is conditioned by a harmony essentially chromatic, which does

not set forth the independence of neighboring tones so decisively as does Schönberg, but imposes the new chords upon a Wagner-like continuo on the leading-tone. This is even clearer in the first three songs from Opus 2, which are built less rigidly than the *Sonata*. Berg's harmony frees itself wholly from the hidden constraint of tonic and dominant. But something essential was adumbrated in this compulsion; it might be called Berg's principle of the infinitesimal; the principle of the smallest transition. Schönberg from the outset, on the basis of incessantly changing and contrasting figures, develops a principle of construction which is dominant even throughout the continual motive transformations and transitions of the *Chamber Symphony*. With Berg, however, the principle of transition, of imperceptible transition, takes precedence from the start, and the residue of harmony based on tonal cadences, which his music contains to this day, is nothing but an indication of this principle. The units of which his music is built up are (it might be said) infinitely small, and, as such are interchanged at will regardless of their differences.

Thus Berg's music may be compared to something that unfolds like a plant. Its scheme is that of the *organism,* while with Schönberg the organic substance is fixed dialectically from the outset by the structural motive. This organic essence in Berg's music is what unites him with the nineteenth century and Romanticism. His problem is stated in such a way that it is gradually elucidated and architectonically grasped, without eliminating the primitive essence which appears in his work originally as dark, amorphous, dream-like and growing unperceived. This is not even altogether foreign to Schönberg—there is enough of it in *Erwartung;* for here both men converge on the elements of psycho-analysis. Perhaps this is not merely a coincidence in the city of Schönberg and Berg. But with Berg the organically subconscious is much less dialectic, one might almost say more Schubert-like, than with Schönberg and therefore less subdued by means of violent dynamics; it is rather sublimated by progressive realization.

The first step in the direction of this sublimation is the *Quartet,* Opus 3.More independent of the leading-tone than the *Sonata,* looser thematically, with its continual variation free of sequence, it develops the principle of the smallest transition through an

imperceptible and skillful division of motives: the themes are frequently reduced to a single tone which binds them with the ensuing motive-unit. The thematic "residue" of such reduction, fitting into each transition, is a form element of the most distinguished sort. Furthermore, the formal structure of the whole, constantly repeating the process of reduction, retains certain harmonic complexes, instead of constantly introducing fresh intervals after the manner of Schönberg. Just as in the first works the interval of the half-tone, the leading-tone, is the binding agent, here the motive-particle acts as the binding agent. This principle of the smallest motive unit then evolves, in the *Pieces for Clarinet and Piano,* to a diminution of the very dimensions of the form; Berg apparently approaches Webern's expressive miniatures. But only apparently: for Webern's miniatures are based on the single occurrence of all motives, while Berg even in the clarinet pieces, clings to the principle of motive transition, thereby establishing a dynamic which requires larger forms because here the single motive never has the definite character which Webern imparts to it.

It is not surprising that in the succeeding work, Berg should depart from this type of form. His path, once intersecting Webern's, now takes a wholly different course. In the *Altenberglieder* there is a passacaglia which anticipates the principles to be laid down later in *Wozzeck.* The *Three Orchestral Pieces,* dedicated to Schönberg, one of Berg's important works, which has not had due appreciation, reveals a complete mastery of the orchestra. Here Berg's contact with Mahler is fruitfully consummated. Mahler's symphonic breadth, the concentration of brass groups, the choric richness of the woodwind movements are felt; the rhythmic character of the motives also has a relation to him. But all is presented through a wholly independent and many-toned harmony and a polyphonic style the fullness of which is scarcely equalled even by Schönberg. At the same time Berg's specific method of procedure, construction from the smallest particles and with the smallest transitions, is strictly preserved. The praeludium is given in its entirety, backwards—crab-fashion—as is the adagio of the *Chamber Concerto* later on. The march finale, whose harmonic polyphony is unequalled, is absolutely over-

powering. The middle movement, composed last, a Reigen in the spirit of Mahler's scherzi, shows a certain clearing of the tonal image which achieves complete transparence in *Wozzeck.*

In *Wozzeck,* Berg's elements of form are perfectly balanced against each other through the power of an intrinsic and central conception. Heavy, subconscious, lush abundance is made to represent heavy, unconscious human beings. The Mahler folk-lore, which was so at odds with independent atonality, here, under the domination of the dramatic idea, is transformed into a subterranean dream folk-lore, which is first revealed in its true light by the dissonant character of the harmony and the dimmed forte of the orchestra. The psychological impulse of Berg's music and the austerity of its construction are united in the dramatic form in which each moment, psychologically conceived, must be unique and unrepeatable while at the same time the totality of the work is built up. A suite, a strict symphony with a powerful scherzo (in the scene at the inn), a succession of five "inventions" which momentarily thrusts a definite composition technic into the foreground—these constitute the musical form of *Wozzeck* which at the same time retains a continuity of leitmotives and, by the ruthless exercise of the device of variation, is left free to follow the dramatic moment at will. Musical forms such as the fugue, passacaglia, song and march are fitted into the work organically. This is not the place to record the entire progression. It is the *tone* of the work which determines *Wozzeck's* rightness: the outcry of oppressed man banished to his dark dream realm, sinking without hope, demanding that human life be changed.

After the opera—to this day the outstanding masterpiece of modern musical dramatic production—Berg withdrew again to the confines of instrumental music. In the *Chamber-Concerto Wozzeck's* structural results appear in a dialogue form. It opens with variations for piano and woodwinds answered by the adagio for violin, with its symmetrical crab passage. The rondo-finale consists of both movements contrapuntalized. These powerful dimensions are masterfully handled; even the boldest combination retains its transparence.

The expressive depth of *Wozzeck* here finds an instrumental interpretation which is carried even further in the *Lyric Suite*

for String Quartet, the most intimate and compact of all Berg's works. This also possesses its own formal idea: the unfolding of extremes. It has three pairs of movements: the first two, allegretto and andantino, related to each other in lyric tenderness; the next movement, a fleeting, whispered allegro and a passionate adagio, their effect enhanced by contrast; the last, rushing to catastrophe in a demonic presto and an inconsolable largo, which, after the final outburst, runs on without end. The material structure, deriving its contrasts from the twelve-tone technic and free composition, corresponds to the expressive structure. It is quite characteristic that the last movement, despite the austerity of its twelve-tone technic, still permits entry to a Tristan quotation by which Berg once again affirms his true origin. In concentration and thematic substance the *Suite* surpasses even *Wozzeck* and is assured of the most immediate effect. After this comes the Baudelaire aria, *Der Wein,* a piece of pure twelve-tone work. Berg is now preparing a second opera, once again using a great literary libretto, Wedekind's *Lulu;* it is developed out of a single twelve-tone series and its derivatives.

Like Berg, Webern is also closely related to the early Schönberg. Not, however, to the master of variations revealed in the *Chamber Symphony,* but to the harmonist of the older vocal music so rich in intervals. If Berg has carried over the Schönberg motive-technic to harmonic cadences, Webern has chosen to adopt Schönberg's evasion of the cadence. In his music, therefore, one will not find Berg's dynamics; his works may be compared rather to blind monads: it is not by chance that his music, particularly the mature pieces, cling to the pianissimo almost as fundamental support. Even Opus 1, the *Passacaglia,* is a masterpiece. The *Chorus,* Opus 2, sublimates the technic of Schönberg's *Friede zu Erden* to an ethereal, floating sound. The *Georgelieder,* Opus 3, with a wholly concealed tonality in the background, are related to Schönberg's *Georgelieder;* they dissolve the latter's contours and fully reveal Webern in the completely incorporeal piano movement. The ensuing cycle, Opus 4, also written to a text of George, the splendid *Welt der Gestalten, Lang Leben*

Wohl, is a somewhat more material work; the harmonic structure is broken and the characteristic melodic profile takes shape.

The first of the five movements for the *String Quartet,* Opus 5, provokes comparison with Berg's *Piano Sonata.* It is a sonata movement which has a strict thematic construction like the whole work. But whereas with Berg the construction is visible and unites the parts, in this case it is concealed. Webern manages the technic of variations from the outset in such a way that the ear can scarcely perceive the motive relations directly, because it is confronted by an uninterrupted flow of fresh thematic material, the organization of which is passed on imperceptibly to the hearer. The dimensions are therefore incomparably smaller, the whole movement containing only a little over fifty bars. The "normal" quartet character is carried to its furthest extreme: pizzicati, harmonics, col' legno effects, divided up and therefore destroyed. The themes are split into particles, not like Berg's, laid one beside the other over an extended surface, but remaining, each one by itself, sharply defined. In the four pieces following, the form is contracted to the miniature. They also reveal (somewhat like Schönberg's *Orchestral Pieces,* Opus 16) the working out of motives, but cannot be granted any outer structure in the traditional sense; even the song form is found only in barest suggestion. They perfect the expressionistic miniature to which Webern has remained so long faithful and which is distinct in the *Six Orchestral Pieces,* Opus 6, with its moving funeral march where Webern, in his own way, for once suggests Mahler.

The ensuing group of works, wholly athematic like Schönberg's *Erwartung,* is built on the smallest dimensions, the material de-substantialized till nothing remains save a breath, a sigh. Thus the *Pieces for Violin and Piano,* Opus 7, which still have a certain melodic coherence and, in logical sequence, the *Bagatelles for String Quartet,* Opus 9, and the *Orchestral Pieces,* Opus 10 (with their overpowering emphasis on the minute), which only brush the disparate tones against each other in a twilight tenderness. Here music is subordinated to a wholly isolated subjectivity, which nevertheless achieves such a purity of perception that it has an extraordinary, moving power. In the *Cello Pieces,* Opus 11, the turning point of Webern's development, the music

actually shrivels to a point, losing its time dimension. From this point it rises afresh, upheld by poetry which alone can lead it.

The *Klavierlieder,* Opus 12, reveal great curves which are at the same time strangely simple, their simplicity and expressive power having something of the sweet flavor that emanates from the shriveled fruit quality of the preceding instrumental works. In the *Chamber Songs,* Opus 14, Webern's encounter with the poet Trakl is consummated. To Trakl he is kin as he is to no other man, even though he surpasses this poet of the forsaken, echo-less self, in the force of creative objectivity by which he conquers loneliness while shaping it to his ends. The last song closes with the words *Strahlender Arme Erbarmen, umfängt ein brechendes Herz*—and nothing could more truly signalize the quality of Webern's music which even in the abyss of sorrow, in its endless sinking, safeguards an anticipation of hope. After the appearance of the Trakl songs, which to this day are his most finished work, his evangelical nature, evangelical despite his catholicism, inspired him to the production of a group of religious compositions. Their deep feeling distinguishes them from all orthodox sacred music; a true radicalism of style emerges in spite of Latin texts, unhampered by archaic tendency and the fiction of a singing congregation. The *Five Sacred Songs* for voice and five solo instruments, Opus 15, are the principal work of the group. Two particularly difficult vocal cycles: *Three Songs* for voice, E flat clarinet and guitar, Opus 18, and *Two Choruses* with chamber music accompaniment, set to poems by Goethe, Opus 19, reveal Webern's inclination toward a twelve-tone technic. They are difficult in a double sense; for performance, on account of the wide intervals which this technic imposes; for the composer, because he faces the problem of preserving his own freed style—that dispenses with any superficiality of composition, recognizes no sequence, and especially no rhythmic repetition—against the demands of the twelve-tone technic. He has succeeded: only enlightened analysis, not an acoustical impression, can distinguish Webern's works in twelve-tone technic from the earlier ones. He has filled out the gap between the independent and the twelve-tone method of procedure which Schönberg's dialectic creates. The moment that he is free in his

command of the novel technic—free in the sense of his own personal expression—he returns to instrumental music. For the first time since Opus 1, he ventures to use the larger dimensions permitted by this new technic without lessening the definitive effect created by his treatment of motives as single incidents.

The two-movement *String Trio,* Opus 20, one of the masterpieces of modern music, presents a counterpart in many respects to Berg's *Lyric Suite.* As Berg in this work achieved something of Webern's tenderness of timbre, the espressivo of his units, so Webern has acquired a capacity to use the extended form, which is similiar to Berg's. Thus they approach each other at the height of their careers, as they did in their beginnings; they demonstrate that the objective content of truth in a style will not disappear in statements of individual difference. The *Trio* begins with a slower, more mobile, tenderly flowing movement. The finale has the character of a sonata, whose scheme finally melts into the expression of subjective freedom, though it retains the original image of an actual, valid sonata.

In the *Symphony,* Opus 12, the masterly disposition of material develops into an astonishing simplification of the style as a whole. It is a symphony only in a vague sense; in the use of a small orchestral apparatus and a certain objective presentation of the whole which detaches itself from Webern's expressionistic technic without being estranged from its original impulse. The first movement is an extremely skillful double canon, the second a series of variation on a quite tender, loosely woven theme, which by means of astonishing combinations condenses and simplifies, even bringing about indirect group relations. The whole achieves, through most complicated means, the impression of compelling music, flowing along naturally. A new, rich work, a *Quartet* for a selected group of chamber instruments has just been completed.

Such is the progress of development in two men of equal birth. In the strict execution of the composer's problems, Schönberg's pupils have become heirs who have inherited what they possess, and thereby carry that inheritance toward the obscure yet nevertheless certain goal of all music. The making of musical history could not be in better hands.