

## NEW MUSIC BY BERG, WEBERN, KRENEK

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THE twelve-tone scale has taken possession of modern music. What resistance there still is, exhausts itself in uncertainty and confusion, but the victory cannot be halted. There is no longer a question of struggle but of exploiting conquered territory. Of course the young and youngest generation of every country are devoted to the new ideas and their possibilities, but even the official schools, academies and so forth, can no longer ignore modern products and theories. No restraints, no flattering obeisances by teachers to the powers of the moment can prevent the young masters from following a proved principle. The new empire created by the twelve-tone system allows individuality to realize all its possibilities with the greatest freedom. Though abstract analysis fails to reveal the secrets of their personality, the composers of the classic harmonic system are different and distinguishable; similarly the personalities of the twelve-tone system may be clearly separated from each other.

Comparing a song by Anton Webern with an arioso from Alban Berg's new opera, *Lulu*, we find two different worlds, the different spheres of two composers, yet with a common foundation, the twelve-tone scale. The *Drei Gesänge*, opus 23, by Webern, which will soon be published by the Universal Edition, are composed on poems of Hildegarde Jone. Modern composers cannot arbitrarily select poems as a basis for composition, as good or bad according to whether their so-called content is poetic, pictorial or even, as we are accustomed to say, musical. Actually the content becomes musical only in so far as it lends itself to composition. Music as a language expresses something exclusive to it. A poem is neither improved nor spoiled by music; once exploited by the tonal art, it enters a new existence, a

reincarnation of the "idea" which lies behind it. The musician, especially the modernist, moves in the realms of the ideal. What is without idea—by idea of course is not meant a theoretical, abstract impression, but the Platonic concept, the "idea" as the realization of mortal understanding—cannot be utilized by the musician. It is for this reason that old and new lyric treasures have been sought out by musicians. As a result we have the fortunate artistic union of a real poet and a real musician, as in the case of Webern and Jone, the latter an Austrian painter and poet who lives in Vienna. The three poems which Webern utilized in opus 23 celebrate the interrelation of man with all creatures, a union which is God, or the divine; they breathe belief in love and immortality. Similarly the music of Webern breathes eternal unity and freedom. Considered only from a musical standpoint, they are of much broader scope than Webern's previous songs. No longer does he sketch the whole world in a single stroke; no longer does he express everything that may be said, in one measure, in one tone. This procedure was once necessary perhaps, for in extreme concentration a counterpoise was found to the resolution of the old musical harmony and to the forms which were inextricably bound up with it. But the twelve-tone system opens the possibility, under certain circumstances the necessity, of expanded musical form. Webern exploits this possibility with happy assurance, and fulfills the necessity with the rigorous observance fitting to a great composer. The *Symphony* which Webern is now completing will reveal how fruitful is the twelve-tone system when formally developed. In this work, Webern's form is more comprehensive, broader in scope than in his earlier music.



The effectiveness of a new principle is almost immediately discernible in the school which it fathers. Ludwig Zenk, a pupil of Webern, has developed under the tutelage of his master into a self-sufficient personality. Last year he won the prize of the Emil Hertzka Foundation with a piano sonata in three movements bound into one and yet separate. A surprising theme, pianistically very effective, opens the work. The last movement,

which has the form of a rondo, is especially noteworthy. Zenk is now busy with a string quartet, which includes a fugue in the strictest sense, and reveals still greater possibilities for the twelve-tone system.

There is even salon music on the twelve-tone basis. A *Romance* for piano by Leopold Spinner, a young Viennese composer, is not an ordinary salon piece that just happens to have been written in the twelve-tone form and could as well have been constructed on another harmonic principle. It is really the middle movement of a sonata, in which the attempt is made to extend the twelve-tone system to the public. He is also the author of a small string quartet, precise in expression and restricted in form.



Now we come to Alban Berg's *Lulu*, a large opera based entirely on the twelve-tone system. The text combines Wedekind's two dramas, *Erdgeist* and *Büchse der Pandora*. Together the two works have seven acts, which are retained in the opera, although condensed to seven scenes. The first three acts of *Erdgeist* are the three scenes of the first act of the opera; the last act of *Erdgeist* and the first of *Büchse der Pandora* are the two scenes of the opera's second act while the last two acts of *Büchse der Pandora* are the two scenes of the last act of the opera. Each act lasts an hour. The orchestral investiture consists of triple wood and brass, and strings, harp, percussion, piano and vibraphone. If in *Wozzeck*, (which in no sense may be ascribed to the twelve-tone system) the character of individual scenes may be said to have created the form, in *Lulu* this form-building function belongs to the character of each of the much more developed stage figures. We are indebted to the composer himself for an explanation of the idea of the opera and the way it has been carried out. In *Wozzeck* unity was given to many small scenes by the unity between character pieces and many musical forms, including those of absolute music. In *Lulu* the song forms are given preference (arias, recitatives, duets, trios, ensembles up to twelve voices.) The orientation of the music rests on the human characters. For example, for the appearance of Dr. Schön the sonata form prevails; for Alma the rondo-

form; for the tragic figure of the Princess Geschwitz the Greek Pentatonic. Nevertheless, unity of individual scenes, even of the individual acts is not sacrificed. This is especially marked in the meeting scene in the third act, and in the two scenes of the second, played in the same setting, Dr. Schön's residence. They are almost symmetrically constructed. The same characters are concerned in the dramatic events before the peripeteia as after. In the middle, after Dr. Schön's murder by Lulu, and before she is freed from prison, comes her capture and imprisonment, portrayed by a silent film with music. The music here is constructed in crab-fashion. This music of the entr'acte is at once the dividing and the unifying center of the whole work. It divides the fate of Lulu into a rising and descending line, and binds both together, where Wedekind separates them into two distinct parts. The twelve-tone scale lying at the foundation of the opera makes the unity of the music perceptible. Through division, changes of direction and transformations of this scale, variety is achieved; often the treatment practically involves leit-motives and leit-harmonies. The vocal parts of the opera are coloratura soprano, high dramatic contralto, lyric tenor, heroic tenor, youthful heroic tenor, heroic baritone, heroic basso, character basso, tenor-buffo, basso-buffo, etc. Berg has selected different parts of the work for concert performance, *Fünf Sinfonische Stücke aus der Oper Lulu*. Where the opera will be introduced is still uncertain.



Nowhere is the opposition to new music so effective as on the operatic stage. This is not only true in Vienna. Wherever there is an opera theatre presenting poor material—and all of them are doing it—the excuse for persisting in the same mistakes, in the same old rut, in the same impotence, is the fabled existence of a traditionally-minded public—which does not attend. Theatrical directors the world over, of drama as well as opera, seem to be ready to make any material sacrifice to present some wretched *Kitsch*, but for a work of art, which even they recognize as such, there never is any money. Today it is practically impossible for an opera theatre to support itself by its own

resources. This is due not only to administrative difficulties but to the transformation of opera as an art form. Music, and not only new music, has advanced much further than the operatic stage, which was created under entirely different necessities. This makes it all the more important to enlist the aid of the musicians in transforming the opera, in bringing it up-to-date. But the opposite viewpoint prevails. The opera theatres seem to believe that they can continue to maintain their present state of inertia by avoiding any traffic with the new music. Paradoxical as it may sound, the financial dependence of the opera on some patron—city, nation, state, public corporation or private person—makes it easier to persist in this fundamentally suicidal conduct. The chances that the patron, or the official who represents the state, will be a supporter of the new direction are very slim. The operatic directors can be sure that there will be no money forthcoming for a work based on the new music, although this is not stated so baldly, especially in Vienna.

Alban Berg is an Austrian and the second composer to pose the question of the relation between the opera theatre and the new music, for Ernst Krenek is also an Austrian, emphatically so. Krenek has composed an opera, *Karl V*, on a text which he has written himself. Apart from its lyric and musical value, it is very Austrian and Catholic-minded, in keeping with the ideas of the ruling class. But this has not brought about even a projected performance, although it was accepted a year ago. Through the newspapers, the composer has learned that he must revise his work, although he has received no official word. Jealous singers who believe their parts are too difficult and too unrewarding because they do not understand the musical structure of their roles, (no one in the state opera taking the trouble to instruct them) have hastened to explain publicly and in confidential circles that the music is a challenge to the public. What public? The state opera requires a considerable support from taxes. This contribution must cover not only the full amount represented by the difference between the actual expenditures and the greatest possible revenue, but must also provide for an additional sum when the greatest possible revenue is not reached. But the funds of the community should be spent only for two



things, first and most important, for the nurturing of living production, and secondly for the maintenance of the old musical heritage, a maintenance which is possible only through constant renovation. Except on those rare occasions when prices are reduced, the masses are as good as excluded from the opera theatre. The same holds true of intellectual circles, musicians, artists. The remainder of the public, in a country and in a city so poverty-stricken, is very small. And this remainder is at heart just as little interested in worthwhile old music as in the new. Sensation is what they crave, and it is this necessity for sensation which is satisfied by the state at the expense of the community. This system, so far as opportunities for art are concerned, can be overthrown only with the help of the artists, only when the artists adopt a firm uncompromising attitude about artistic matters.

There is under consideration a work by Krenek which was produced in Switzerland, *Kantate von der Vergänglichkeit des Irdischen*, opus 72, with mixed choir, soprano solo and piano. The cantata, as the score reveals, was finished in 1932. It has a two-fold character. The basic text is six poems by five German poets of the beginning and middle of the seventeenth century, that is, the time of the Thirty Years War. The poems are wonderfully gripping in their contemplation of nature, man and God. The composer has not only selected his material with the greatest taste, but he has unified it. The first poem of the cantata is constructed on something of a madrigal form. One key is discernible. The character changes after a few measures with the second theme, although derivations and transitions from the first are retained. A motif which rises in the soprano part is of decisive importance in the second part of the cantata, a soprano solo. It is harmonically and spiritually important, the confirmation of disaster, of death. The binding together of motives, and the unity of spiritual quality is never lost sight of; yet the sudden change in the harmonic medium, in the whole style, does not seem entirely fundamental, at least not always convincing. Entirely tonal, after an almost childishly pleasant introduction, there is a choral piece in B major, directly followed by a soprano solo of more modern construction. Climaxes, connections interweavings, lead on to other sections, the basis of each being an in-



ERNST KRENEK

A Portrait by

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dividual poem, and finally to the really striking close, a canon to the words of the great *Abend*, by Andräus Gryphius (1616-1664). The canon is well led, expanded motivistically, and released after suddenly introduced supplementary chords—an expression of longing for the greatest God, “Zu Dir, zu Dir, zu Dir.”

It is a work of great talent, at times revealing great strength of expression, but it is not so unified in musical development as in the basic spiritual idea. Perhaps it is a compromise, which would be a pity. It is quite possible that Krenek here has sought some individual path on which he can turn from the twelve-tone scale, and so has lost himself in territory long since left behind him, and which he never really wanted to tread again.