THE LATE WORKS

LOU HARRISON

BEFORE discussing Arnold Schönberg's late works, I should say first that I know them chiefly from a study of the available scores. The N.B.C. performance of the *Piano Concerto,* Opus 42, early in February, was the first orchestral piece of the period that I have actually heard. Of that production it should be set down for the record that the solo part was beautifully played by Edward Steuermann under the leadership of Leopold Stokowski. I now wonder why Schönberg isn't more often presented. I would certainly travel a distance and pay a price to hear his other big works.

Part of the excitement of this occasion was a pleasant surprise in the beauty of sound made by the orchestra. Schönberg's use of the orchestra is like no other composer's, saving, perhaps, Bach's. The instruments are treated almost always as in chamber music, and though the score contains much of doubling and strengthening of individual lines, the general effect is still one of differentiation among the sounds. Particularly striking is the use of brass which plays muted more often than not, and makes lovely, reedy sounds. The use of the piano throughout is in the best of taste, never relaxing into arpeggiated accompaniments nor, on the other hand, challenging the orchestra to the conventional virtuoso battle. In this way the work bears a noticeable relation to the concerto-grosso style.

The experience of examining the score (published by G. Schirmer) and further hearings of recordings made at the broadcast only confirm the profound impression of the performance. In form the concerto is divided into four sections, but it is played as one movement. This four-in-one form harkens directly back to the *First Quartet* and the *Chamber Symphony.* It is an arrangement of which Schönberg seems particularly fond. The opening andante in 3/8 is a long and undulating cantilena for the piano. The orchestra gradually joins in and there is a development out of which emerges the second movement – a kind of scherzo, rapid and brilliant. This section is marked by every sort of instrumental amusement – percussion, tremolandos, sul ponticello, harmonics and the like – taken directly out of the early expressionist style but here used in a genuinely classic piece and without suggesting a program. The adagio which follows is more contrapuntal and symphonic in nature, and very moving. A short

cadenza leads directly into the last movement, an invigorating rondo. In character, this is of a piece with the finales of his *Third* and *Fourth Quartets* and that of the *Wind Quintet,* and is in one of his most captivating styles. There follows an exciting stretto, and with a few chords the concerto is ended.

The concerto was completed December 30, 1942 and is inscribed to Henry Clay Schriver, who commissioned the work. In contrast to Schönberg's other late pieces this one seems to revert to the more ingratiating manner of the *Third Quartet* and the *Variations for Orchestra.* There is a less broken quality about the continuity. The sudden stops and violent motives of the *Fourth Quartet* are not nearly so evident here, rather, there is a feeling of clarity and consistency from beginning to end. In comparison with the *Violin Concerto* one notices a more concertante manner of treating the solo and a more informal sequence of ideas. The bitter brilliance of style in the *Violin Concerto* and the rigidity of its three conventional movements help make it far less accessible to the average listener than the *Piano Concerto.*

One of the major joys in this piece, as in many other of his absolute compositions, is in the structure of the phrases. You know when you are hearing a theme, a building or answering phrase, a development or a coda. There is no swerving from the form-building nature of these classical phrases. The pleasure to be had from listening to them is the same that one has from hearing the large forms of Mozart and the other Viennese masters. This is a feeling too seldom communicated in contemporary music, in much of which the most obvious formal considerations are not evident at all. The definiteness of Schönberg's ideas about phrase and form he has himself expressed many times, and that he practices what he preaches, is evident even without the score, from one hearing of the *Concerto.* The nature of his knowledge in this respect, perhaps more than anything else, places him in the position of torch-bearer to tradition in the vital and developing sense.

The *Piano Concerto* is a twelve-tone piece on the series E♭ B♭ D F E C F♯ G♯ C♯ A B G, and introduces many new devices for expanding the technic. It is not my intention here to enter into a discussion of twelve-tone problems. The nature of this technic should by now be a matter of common knowledge. However, one must note the inclusion in the present work of ideas similar to those in the late music of Berg. New devices of doubling, classical chordal figurations and octave skips are all in evidence.

I believe that the full expansion necessary to make the twelve-tone technic as useful as the classic tonal organization has been achieved in this *Concerto.*

III

Since Schönberg's arrival in America his music has undergone a distinct change. Whether this has been due to the influence of his new environment or to the natural advent of a third period is not certain. His first work here was the *Suite for String Orchestra.* Since it was written as a useful piece for schools and colleges it displays but few of the characteristics of the new style. However, the next two works, the *Violin Concerto,* Opus 36, and the *Fourth Quartet,* Opus 37, are marked by a style so arrestingly different from the preceding one that the beginning of a new period is evident.

Since the whole texture and effect of a twelve-tone piece is to a large extent determined by the structure of the original series, it might be interesting to show the vital difference between typical rows of the middle period and the rows of the *Violin Concerto* and the *Fourth Quartet.*

MIDDLE PERIOD

Wind Quintet: E♭ G A B C♯ C♮ B♭ D E F♯ A♭ F♮
Variations for Orchestra: B♭ E F♯ E♭ F♮ A D C♯ G♮ G♯ B C

LATE PERIOD

Violin Concerto: A B♭ E♭ B♮ E♮ F♯ C♮ C♯ G A♭ D F
Fourth Quartet: D C♯ A B♭ F E♭ E♮ C A♭ G F♯ B

It will be seen at once by this comparison that in the late period a distinct preference is shown for the fifth and minor second as opposed to the major second and third of the middle period. In the music itself the stress is laid on these new intervals, which makes for a different sound and accounts both for the steely brilliance of some passages and the tonally-rooted Hebraic quality of others. The series of the *Piano Concerto* is so made that all kinds of parallel fourth and fifth chords are possible; however, various other factors in the composition cut down the hardness of sound.

In the musical structure of Schönberg's works from Opus 26 to Opus 36, every effort is made to achieve stylistic unity by close imitation and a general tendency to maintain a single dominant rate of rhythmic flow. In the *Violin Concerto* and the *Fourth Quartet* this is not the case, but the clarity and simplicity of form he attained in, for instance, the *Third*

Quartet is not sacrificed, though much of the method is abandoned. In these works a more delicate and occult balance of forms is maintained, which allows for greater differentiation of musical idea and intense dramatic contrast. It is the kind of structural difference that exists between, say, the structure of Schubert's music and that of Brahms. This essential freedom within a sensitive over-all balance has made it possible for Schönberg to reintroduce the special expressive features of his early expressionist style without inferring either an esthetic regression or an upset in the solidity of his works. Both in length and conception the late period has seen a continuation and establishment of the high classic values which Schönberg began to assume shortly after his extraordinary creation of the twelve-tone technic.

Besides the *Violin Concerto,* the *Fourth Quartet,* and the *Piano Concerto,* which must be included among the major works of the late period, there are also the *Second Chamber Symphony* begun in 1906 but completed only recently, the *Variations for Band,* and the *Ode to Napoleon* which is discussed elsewhere in this issue. Among didactic writings penned in America are the *Faculty Research Lecture, U.C.L.A., 1942,* his only treatise on twelve-tone composition; the *Models for Beginners* and the large work on counterpoint which is nearing completion.

III

Schönberg is, at the time of this writing, temporarily retired from teaching and one looks forward to the works of his leisure. Already he has written much in the United States and has contributed generously to our musical life. As an American citizen he is singularly well adjusted, amiable, inquisitive. He has enough energy today to supply several twenty-year olds. He seems in much better health and much younger than when he arrived in this country. Limping into the class-room, one day last spring, he explained that his toe had been injured in an accident at his workshop. He had been building furniture. His hobby-habit, perhaps, contributes much to his excellent vigor and helps appease an insatiable curiosity. That curiosity is, of course, proverbial. It has made him the most reliable compendium of musical knowledge in existence. He said one day that many accused him of being a mathematician. There was a moment's silence; then he mock-maliciously remarked that he couldn't help it if he could think better than others. One must agree. May his seventieth birthday find him as vigorous and adventurous as ever.