

VIENNA SINCE THE ANSCHLUSS

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To the Editor:

When your request for an article reached me, I was deeply affected. Since my last review, many years had passed and even when I saw that in print, I knew it was no longer possible to write for you. I could not dare then really to express my thoughts, and if I wrote between the lines how could you, living in a country where every man's right to freedom of expression is taken for granted, understand? That report was not only my last for MODERN MUSIC; I wrote nothing for publication thereafter.

And now at last we are freed from fetters on mind and spirit; we have reached the first stages of reconstruction and we are still not convinced that freedom is an actuality, not a longing and a dream. We are just beginning to pick up our ties with the world, to orientate ourselves, and we are trying to drink up in months what we have been deprived of for years. It is almost too soon to glance back, to look forward. We hardly see further than what is actually about us, spatially as well as in time, for we are still in the confusion of liberation. We can hardly believe that we no longer live in the shadow of death because we listened to a work by Schönberg on the radio last night. We plan programs but do not notice that we have scarcely anything to eat or to warm ourselves with. We prepare music festivals, reorganize musical life – and create illusions. It is a happy time, everything is in flux, everything is in the process of becoming. It is a time of hope but not of accomplishment or fulfillment. Thus you can hardly expect objectivity from me, bound up as I am in this process of reorganization.

I have used "we" but this is neither editorial nor royal. A group of old friends, who once were in the vanguard for new music and were torn apart during the war, have now come together in Vienna after the end of the struggle. Cannon still thundered in the outer suburbs as we took measures to revive the International Society for Contemporary Music. We met at the Universal Edition offices in the old Musikverein building

which had been spared from the ravages of war. Here we formed a cell of pioneers to take the initiative in all fields of music in the months to follow. This group included Friedrich Wildgans, son of the Austrian poet, an outstanding clarinetist and an agreeable composer; the composers, Hans Erich Apostel and Alexander Spitz; the pianist, Olga Novakovic, one of the best interpreters of Schönberg and Webern; Josef Polnauer, Ernst Hartmann, Erwin Ratz and a young French music student whom I had rescued from slave labor in a munitions factory during the war.

Our activities won much immediate support. I cannot recall a time in Vienna when there has been so much interest in new music as during the first months after the liberation. Enforced abstinence produced a natural reaction. Previously scorned composers were now attractive because they had been forbidden to an audience once alienated by concerts of modern music. The former liberal Viennese concertgoer could follow the performance of a classic with the score and was able to analyze a work fairly well, but invariably turned away when a new sound violently shook the confines of his circumscribed world. The princely patrons of the classical period willingly indulged the whims of perverse composers, but the state officials who later presumed to carry on this mission demanded that genius confine itself to the limits of their own intellectual horizons. The climax of this suppression was the almost hopeless lethargy of 1934-38. Now seven years of trumpets and concentration camps have by their terror roused the genius of the thousand-year-old Reich. The next few years will show the extent to which Vienna has grasped the meaning of this history.

Austria has had a way of making her talents homeless. She sent Mahler, Schönberg and Krenek into exile. Alban Berg, Webern and Hauer were hardly known in their fatherland. Neither honored nor oppressed, they were treated with derision. These men, who demonstrated that Austria was more than a musical museum-piece or a land of hireling singers, that it could and did contribute creatively to the present, were dependent on foreigners for recognition and their livelihood. We can never be grateful enough that alien nations supported all those whom the brutal northern invader drove out of their country. But we must also be honest enough to recognize the fact that Goebbels was not the first to deprive the most important men of their means of living and working in Austria.

It is a tragedy that Webern met death at the very moment when he was about to step into a free life, that he did not survive to enjoy his destined rehabilitation after so many injustices. It is a tragedy for us too, for we need his counsel and his wisdom. I can speak of this great and heartwarming musician only with the humblest reverence. His modest demeanor cloaked an unbelievable knowledge and goodness. He led a

life dedicated entirely to music. It was not rich in external recognition. He became known to a wider audience only in those few years in which he conducted the workers' symphony concerts. His greatest influence was through his teaching, even though this reached only a small circle of private students who deified him and had made the pilgrimage to Vienna from many countries. He knew, as no other, how to make his inexhaustible learning accessible, nurtured young talent with paternal affection and counseled the same seriousness and responsibility with which he himself composed. The middle classes' distrust prevented his ever holding an official teaching post, so he lived a retired life in a suburb of Vienna with the modesty of a man who knows his own worth.

When circumstances forced most of his pupils to leave, he ran the risk of being forced into factory labor. I was able to get him a position with the Universal Edition, where he was sheltered by the excuse of essential work. Thus I had the good fortune of having him near me for months, when he was working on his last compositions, a set of orchestral variations and two cantatas which he considered the most important of all his music. These are creations in which Webern, without losing his subtlety, took larger forms for his design. Unforgettable is the recollection of Webern at the piano, indicating rather than playing, bringing this music, a mathematical marvel, to life. The sound alone was of importance; all intellectual craftsmanship dissolved into a musical expression that found its way unerringly to the heart.

We traveled together to Switzerland during the war, to hear Scherchen give the premiere of the *Variations* in Winterthur. This was the last time he heard one of his works performed in a concert hall. Afterwards he spoke frequently of the event as well as of the rendition by the B.B.C. chorus of *Augenlicht* a few years before. At one time he announced that he wished to complete the unfinished parts of Berg's *Lulu*, but this remained only an intention.

The nerves of this sensitive composer could not stand the ever increasing bombing of Vienna. He withdrew to his children's home in the Tyrol. When we organized the I.S.C.M. he was unanimously elected president. I learned later that he never received this news. Because of the difficult living conditions in the city and his weakened health – shattered further by the loss of his son shortly before the war ended – he planned to spend the winter in his refuge in the American zone of Austria. Almost simultaneously with the first re-hearing of one of his works – Elisabeth Höngen sang some Lieder – his fate overtook him.

Like Webern, Joseph Matthias Hauer, despite his age, may be classed with the youngest group, because of his progressiveness. His development has been in a straight line and he has built his system with uncompromising

consistency. His method of arranging the twelve tones, fundamentally different from the composition technique of Webern and Schönberg, involves a deliberate turning away from purely musical ideas. Hauer denies the existence of an "art." He classes the discovery of the twelve-tone series with the discovery of the orbits of the stars and considers it just as presumptuous to write critiques about the one scientific fact as about the other. In recent years he has composed pieces with twenty-four tones. These are examples of his final system which, according to what he has written, may be expanded at will. The twelve-tone series becomes an intellectual game, which Hauer is convinced will at some future date assume the role that chess has today. He is very much alone. With his white Vandyke he looks like a Don Quixote, and when he talks the fire of genius shines in his eyes.

In Vienna the Schönberg school is still importantly represented by Apostel, a man of many gifts. He has finished a Hölderlin cycle and is now working on a large scale symphony whose Adagio – for string orchestra – an ambitious memorial to Berg, his teacher, is already completed. The remaining representatives of the thirty-to-fifty-year-old group, whom we still call "the young generation" from force of habit, reveal other influences. Theodor Berger is a wilful, visionary composer with impressionistic tendencies. During the war he wrote a ballad for full orchestra that inveighed against the horrible stupidity of the conflict. Now he is at work on a *Homeric Fantasy*, a work of large dimensions for chorus, orchestra and ballet. Alfred Uhl, who was badly wounded in the war and whose output in recent years was severely curtailed by his despondency, has had a burst of creative activity since the liberation. He has written three large orchestral works in which his pleasant talent seems to be developing along national lines. In his *Hymnes à la paix* Alexander Spitzmüller adopts France as his fatherland, stylistically speaking. Only the contrapuntalist, Johann Nepomuk David, remains to be mentioned. After the war he returned to Austria and is now at work on the reconstruction of his symphonies, which were destroyed in the conflict.

New names are bobbing up although the youngest generation has suffered a real setback. It will have a sharper profile when the poison of National Socialism is cast out. Familiarity with contemporary idioms was denied these young men during the Third Reich. A compact *Toccata* for two pianos by the twenty-four-year-old Anton Heiller employs severe polyphonic devices; nevertheless a strong temperament is in evidence. The work flirts with Hindemith yet reveals a personality of its own. Gottfried von Einem, barely older, who has given us a ballet, orchestral pieces, piano works and songs, has studied Stravinsky and jazz with Boris Blacher in Berlin. He is now completing an opera on Büchner's *Dantons Tod*.

While orchestra concerts have listed little new music, there has been much interesting activity in the chamber music field. One of the I.S.C.M. programs gave the premiere of two works by Hanns Eisler which he had written to anti-fascist texts shortly before the Nazi occupation. The scores were hidden in the home of Eisler's friend, Erwin Ratz, behind the flour sacks out of which he fed the Underground Railroad during the long years. The newly organized Austrian Kulturvereinigung, directed by energetic Egon Seefehlner, frequently sponsors living composers. Hindemith in particular has found a public. A group of the youngest musicians has even organized a "Mathis Circle." The Saturday afternoon private concerts which I have held at the Universal Edition for a small group of invited guests have been particularly well received, since they offer an opportunity for explanation and discussion.

We eagerly await the scores of works which were heard in other countries during the war. Some material has already been supplied through the kind co-operation of the musical members of the armies of occupation. This includes records of some of the new major works of Schönberg. Unfortunately the apparatus on which these giant records must be played lies behind the line of demarcation, so we can only admire the silent grooves with faithful respect.

In May we intend to make a unified stand; we shall take the initial steps toward contact with the outside world by means of the first Vienna festival. We dream that Toscanini, Walter and Kleiber will conduct, that Schönberg, Stravinsky, Milhaud, Martinu and Krenek will stretch out their hands to us. Our faith is strong and we have in this country a boundless love of music.