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STYLE AND IDEA: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg, edited by Leonard Stein with translations by Leo Black Faber and Faber, 1975 (£17.50)

SERIAL COMPOSITION AND ATONALITY: An Introduction to the Music of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern (2nd Edition), by George Perle Faber and Faber, paperback edition, 1975 (£2.60) KEITH POTTER

Now that the centenary celebrations are well and truly over and Schoenberg has been duly canonised, we can return to the serious business of examining his music and ideas on a rather more mundane level. We may even find that, with our perspective on this still controversial figure somewhat refreshed in the interval that has now elapsed, we can approach him from a new standpoint which seeks to emulate neither the fanatical advocacy of, in their different ways, Milton Babbitt and the *Perspectives of New Music* group or Hans Keller or Alexander Goehr on the one hand, or the divided loyalties of Pierre Boulez on the other. It's amazing that the pamphleteering has gone on for so many years, and it seems a good time to call a halt, for it's rather got in the way of the music and even of the ideas.

Presumably the revised and much expanded second edition of *Style and Idea*, which Faber have finally published after several years of waiting in a rather deluxe format and at the rather deluxe price of £17.50, can now be considered a sizeable contribution to this more sober approach. Schoenberg remains at once his own best and worst polemicist, and he wasn't above (or beneath) the really tub-thumping, heart-searching and even rather paranoid stuff of which, fortunately, not all composers are made. Yet to put it in a handsomely bound 'library' volume like this reduces its polemical impact and brings it down to the level of 'research material'. Even a case like 'How One Becomes Lonely' (his first big lecture conceived in English and dating from 1937), which tells again the sad story of the misunderstanding Schoenberg had to suffer, even with such an early work as *Verklärte Nacht*, and well illustrates how he defended himself against a hostile world, can now be looked on as part of history, even though it's a history that has repeated itself with a disconcerting regularity ever since. For there are still plenty of people who echo today the complaint that Schoenberg said he had heard more times than anyone had ever heard *Verklärte Nacht* itself: "If only he had continued to compose in this style!"

This volume, which really bears little resemblance to the first edition, except that it includes 13 of the 15 items which were collected under the same title in 1950,¹ tends, however tenuous the truth of it might seem, to give the impression that Schoenberg has won through. How different must that first edition have seemed a quarter of a century ago: a pioneering, cheaply produced little book of polemics, scarcely destined to make a big impact upon conservative musical England in the year Schoenberg died. (See the collection of views published in *Music and Letters* that year² for a sample of 'establishment' opinions of the time, and compare it with the mixture of 'establishment' and 'non-establishment' views which were published 23 years later in *Contact 93*: there are some interesting parallels.) I can remember trying to get hold of it as an under-graduate, and discovering to my amazement that it was out of print (and had been so for some years, I think). The rare copies which came one's way, including the illegal photocopies which Alexander Goehr mentions in his review of the new edition,⁴ made the whole thing more exciting, almost conspiratorial, as the passing from hand to hand of rare scores by Schoenberg and Webern in the 1930s, 40s and even 50s must have seemed. And the other sort of conspiracy, perpetrated by Babbitt (cultural hegemony imposed by intellectual supremacy), combined with the widespread lack of knowledge from which, despite the BBC's advocacy in the 1960s, all too many music students and music lovers seemed to suffer, made me determined to present something by way of fact and informed opinion in this magazine.⁵

Now here is a sizeable chunk of Schoenbergiana, edited with scholarly care and 39 pages of notes and appendices by Leonard Stein (though properly precise references to where the previously published material may be found is lacking), and translated where necessary, apparently with his usual great attention to nuance and every detail, by Leo Black. Schoenberg must have written a vast amount of words during the course of his life, even if you don't include his own books and, of course, his letters. This collection of 104 items (as compared with the original edition's 15) runs to 559 pages and is much more representative of Schoenberg's writings over the whole period of his life, with items dating from 1909 to the year of his death (the earlier date is wrongly given as 1911 in the preface), whereas the first edition, while including two items from as early as 1912, concentrates on the English essays of the 1940s. It contains many of his longer articles and lectures, whether originally written in German or English (some of the English articles which did not appear in the first edition were corrected at the time by that book's editor, Dika Newlin, for a second, unrealised collection). It also includes a small portion of his other writings, both previously published and unpublished: sketches for articles and lectures, speeches, unfinished projects, replies to questionnaires, replies to and a commentary on articles by others and so on. Most of these, complete or incomplete, were meticulously signed, dated and filed away, often in duplicate, under a multitude of headings which, unfortunately, were rather haphazardly adhered to, so that Stein found he could not use them in the preparation of this collection.

There is much, inevitably, that the book does not contain. The major omissions would seem to be Schoenberg's own analyses, a very sizeable manuscript entitled 'The Musical Idea and its Presentation' that Josef Rufer has called the composer's most fundamental theoretical work,⁶ his diary from 1912 (the year of the composition of *Pierrot Lunaire*) called the *Berliner Tagebuch*⁷ and, of course, the majority of his letters, only a small selection of which were published in Erwin Stein's edition.⁸ Much of this material may well fit better into separate volumes, of course. This is the plan, apparently, with the analyses and, quite naturally, with the unpublished letters; the diary has already been published in German,

and I hope an English translation will be encouraged out of someone soon to follow Humphrey Searle's forthcoming translation of H.H. Stuckenschmidt's full critical biography. I am particularly looking forward to reading 'The Musical Idea and its Presentation': I hope someone can manage to publish that, too, before long.

But it's therefore all that much more disappointing to find so many rather insignificant bits and pieces in the present collection, however occasionally titillating they may be to Schoenberg scholars. The published letters have already told us enough of Schoenberg's almost embarrassingly servile attitude to higher authorities, so we can do without his speech accepting the Honorary Citizenship of Vienna in 1949, with or without the cryptic references to the way that city had treated him in the past. And when so much remains to be said about the music, it hardly seems justifiable to print ephemera on such matters as 'Parsifal and Copyright' (1912) or even some of the sarcastic replies to criticism, apparently some kind of bad imitation of Karl Kraus.

The collection is divided into ten sections, which sprinkle the essays from the first edition into the new material along the way. There is no attempt at chronological ordering, even within sections, and Stein's placing of essays and fragments in sometimes odd juxtapositions seems to provide more a means of variety than of coherence on occasion. In Part I, 'Personal Evaluation and Retrospect', 'The Young and I' (1923) is interesting for its comments on the situation in which Schoenberg and his pupils found themselves immediately after the First World War. These remarks are complemented by those on Webern, Berg and others in the ninth section of the book called 'Composers': in particular the famous foreword to Webern's Op. 9 (1924), but even more so the almost paranoid attitude to Webern's apparent secretiveness about his compositional discoveries that Schoenberg shows in his discussion of the origins of *Klangfarbenmelodie* written in the last year of his life. This gives us a tantalising glimpse into the less familiar sides of the musical, as well as personal, relationships between the members of the Viennese 'trinity', on which the rest of the new *Style and Idea* unfortunately casts little further light.

There are some worthwhile apologetics in such articles as 'New Music: My Music' (c. 1930) and 'Constructed Music' (c. 1931)

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in Part I, despite some unfortunate gaps in their sadly incomplete texts, but neither here nor in Part II, 'Modern Music', which contains several comments on the function of radio, only recently available commercially at the time the articles were written, do we find one of the best actual radio talks, and one of Schoenberg's most stimulating defences, that I have come across: his own highly illuminating talk, broadcast by the BBC in the centenary year and again in 1975, in which he demonstrated how he could have harmonised the theme of his *Variations for Orchestra* tonally by actually writing a version of it which the orchestra played as an example. Part III contains the famous 'Folkloristic Symphonies' (1947), but also such other rather different reactions to nationalism as 'Why no Great American Music?' (1934), which was a reply to an article in the *American Mercury*. Diatribes on critics and music historians may be found in Part IV, 'Critics and Criticism'.

Parts V and VI, entitled 'Twelve-tone Composition' and 'Theory and Composition' respectively, are more substantial. Much of the material is new, although the most important item, the first of the two entitled 'Composition with Twelve Tones' (1941), appeared in the first edition.⁹ There is a good deal of considerable interest here, with useful expositions of some aspects of twelve-note techniques. As with essays such as 'How One Becomes Lonely' and 'Heart and Brain in Music' (1946) from Part I, musical examples are plentiful, including several in 'Composition with Twelve Tones (1)' for a discussion of the *Variations for Orchestra* rather different from the one I mentioned above. But one of the best items in the whole book is the two-page 'Twelve-Tone Composition' (1923), which opens Part V, a wonderfully concise summary of the implications and results of this then new idea. 'Opinion or Insight' (1926) is apparently based on ideas from 'The Musical Idea and Its Presentation', mentioned earlier. A lengthy discourse on 'Problems of Harmony' (1934) is worth reading, but like some of the other essays in these two sections could in places have been better and more simply expressed. Part VII, 'Performance and Notation', is not without some original ideas, including several in 'A new Twelve-Tone Notation' (1924) of a quite surprisingly radical nature, but the material in Parts VIII, IX and X, 'Teaching', 'Composers' and 'Social and Political Matters' respectively, is, apart from the three items taken from the first edition, not of great value and mostly of autobiographical interest. 'Brahms the Progressive' (1947) and 'Gustav Mahler' (1912, rev. 1948), however, retain all their cogent vitality, as does 'Eartraining through Composing' (1939).

The new *Style and Idea*, then, is a significant but variable collection, making available a good deal of material, but not, I suspect, by any means all the most interesting of the previously unpublished writings. Even where articles have appeared in English outside the first edition before, as, for instance, in the case of the very important 'My Evolution' (1949), which went through versions in several languages before it finally appeared in *The Musical Quarterly*,¹⁰ it is useful to have them under one cover, and, of course, it almost goes without saying that the essays from the first edition form the backbone of the present collection.

Despite my admiration for the high quality of presentation displayed by this volume in these hard times, I find it a pity to think that the large typeface and quite wilful squandering of space in the placing of both text and musical examples must have contributed to its high price. It doesn't seem likely that a paperback edition will be forthcoming in the near future at least, so I hope Faber will consider Goehr's suggestion of bringing out a reduced version of the new edition containing the essential and non-autobiographical material. To confine the important parts of this book to library use would be to make *Style and Idea*, mark II as inaccessible in time as *Style and Idea*, mark I became, and thus perpetrate ignorance of Schoenberg's ideas yet again.

Faber have also recently brought out a paperback version of the second edition of George Perle's important and well-known *Serial Composition and Atonality* originally published in 1968. (The first edition appeared in 1962.) Perle is always in danger of alienating his would-be readers in the same way as Babbitt, with whom he has quite a lot in common. But there can be no denying that his book should be struggled with by all music students and that they are likely to get more out of it than out of the average piece of first-hand, or, worse, second-hand Babbittism.

I see little point in discussing it in detail, however, since a third edition has apparently been available in the USA for some years (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1971), and it is this which should really have been made available to us in paperback form. One of the best discussions of the second edition, considered in the context of contemporary thinking about serialism in general, can be found in Roger Smalley's review in *Tempo* 90;¹¹ the force of his arguments, no matter what one thinks about Babbitt's approach and his music (and I don't always agree with Smalley's opinions of either of these),

has not been diminished by the intervening years.

NOTES:

¹ed. and trans. Dika Newlin, *Style and Idea* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950; London: Williams and Norgate, 1951). The missing items are 'A Dangerous Game', which discusses the relationship of the artist to politics, and 'To the Wharfs', a strange fictional fragment which recalls Kafka. Both are so brief that it seems illogical to omit them from the present collection.

²'Arnold Schoenberg 1874-1951', *Music and Letters*, Vol.32, No.4 (October 1951), pp.305-323.

³'Schoenberg Today: the views of some contemporary composers', contributed to by Geoffrey Burgon, Jonathan Harvey, John Joubert, Virgil Thomson, Stuart Ward and Hugh Wood, *Contact* 9 (Autumn 1974), pp.3-18.

⁴In *Tempo* 114 (September 1975), pp.25-28. This review, incidentally, is useful, but contains a number of mistakes, including the attribution of 'A Dangerous Game', published in the first edition of *Style and Idea*, to the second, thus making a total of 14 items reprinted from the original edition instead of the correct total of 13. See also footnote 9.

⁵See *Contacts* 3, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10. These cover a wide variety of subjects, too many to detail here; the authors of the individual full-length articles are Laurence Williamson, John Drummond, Arnold Whittall, Richard Emsley and Martin Dreyer. A complete set of photocopies of these, including the composers' contributions listed above, can be obtained from the editor for £2.00 including postage.

⁶'Opinion or Insight?', published in the present collection (pp.258-264) apparently uses ideas from this, and in his note on this item (p.524) Stein says that many of the main topics discussed in what must be one of Schoenberg's most ambitious projects were apparently dealt with in later books and articles. Its contents are discussed in Josef Rufer, *The Works of Arnold Schoenberg* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) pp.137-138.

⁷Arnold Schoenberg, ed. Josef Rufer, *Berliner Tagebuch* (Berlin: Propylaen, 1975, in German). Charles Rosen has reviewed this, together with *Style and Idea*, in 'The possibilities of disquiet', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 74th year, No. 3,843 (Friday November 7, 1975), pp.1335-1336.

⁸ed. Erwin Stein, trans. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser, *Arnold Schoenberg Letters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964; pbk. ed. 1974). For a review of this see *Contact* 9 (Autumn 1974), pp.34-35.

⁹It is this which was published in the original edition of *Style and Idea*, and not 'Connection of Musical Ideas' as Alexander Goehr, in his review mentioned above, mistakenly maintains.

¹⁰Arnold Schoenberg, 'My Evolution', *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol.38, No.4 (October 1952), pp.517-527.

¹¹Roger Smalley, 'Serialism for Today', *Tempo* 90 (Autumn 1969), pp.2-7.