UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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A Survey of Webern's Life and Compositional Vocabulary

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Music

by

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-David M. Shere July 31, 2007

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ABSTRACT

A Survey of Webern's Life and Compositional Vocabulary

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David Matthew Shere

Anton Webern is considered one of the defining composers of the 20thcentury serial revolution and the *avant garde*. An examination of his evolution as a composer demonstrates that he developed his compositional vocabulary in three distinct musical periods: an early Romantic phase, an experimental phase of free atonality, and a later phase of mature serialism.

The impact of Schoenberg's mentorship on Webern cannot be overstated, as it was Schoenberg's influence that guided Webern to explore free atonality and serialism. The various events of Webern's life, particularly the death of his mother, also played a major role in his musical and artistic development. This paper explores Webern's three periods in some depth, analyzing a major work from each period as well as exploring Webern's sketches and unfinished works, and also makes an effort to review key events of Webern's personal life.

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A Survey of Webern's Life and Compositional Vocabulary

By David M. Shere

I. Introduction

"He speaks of the world in miniature: of luminous particles sunk into matter..." --Robert Black¹

The music of Anton von Webern presents a daunting obstacle for any contemporary student who might be trying to develop an original theoretical point of view. Webern's compositions have arguably been studied to the point of analytical exhaustion. The mathematical aspects of the music have been endlessly scrutinized and thoroughly classified by renowned specialists.

Webern's biographical particulars, and the underlying techniques and philosophies which inform the formal, harmonic, and melodic architecture of Webern's music, have been authoritatively- and for the most part, conclusivelyaddressed by eminent experts in the field. Historians such as Kathryn Bailey and the late Hans Moldenhauer, both musicologists with access to Webern's original autographs, sketch notes, journals, and effects, have shed light on pressing questions surrounding the details of Webern's working methods and personal life. Theorists such as Allen Forte, Robert Morris, and Peter Westergaard have thoroughly addressed questions surrounding Webern's serial techniques and manipulations of pitch-sets.

¹ Black, Robert. **Anton Webern in a Dream.** *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 23, No. 2. (Spring - Summer, 1985). p. 119.

Facsimiles of a selection of Webern's sketches have been printed and made publicly available,² answering numerous specific questions about Webern's compositional techniques and working processes. Kathryn Bailey has also reproduced Webern's complete row tables in black-and-white,³ a contribution which is indispensable to the theoretical community. A paper such as this would not be possible without access to these vital scholarly contributions.

While there is much valuable information that has been published, there is also important analytical data which is known to exist, but which is unavailable for whatever reason. For instance, one advisor felt very strongly that I should reference Robert Morris's analyses of Webern's Op. 21 and Op. 27 in order for this paper to be complete. Unfortunately, it turns out that according to Morris himself these analyses are unpublished, so referencing them is simply not an option at this time. It is of course my hope that eventually these critical works will be publicly accessible.⁴

Dear David Shere,

Best, Bob Morris

² Webern, Anton von. Sketches (1926-1945). Carl Fischer Inc.: New York, 1968.

³ Bailey, Katherine. "Webern's row tables." **Webern Studies.** Edited by Kathryn Bailey. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996. pp. 170-228.

⁴ In response to an e-mail to Professor Morris requesting assistance in locating his analyses of Op. 21 and Op. 27, I received the following reply:

Sent : Saturday, July 7, 2007 5:48 AM

To: David Shere <zylaxis@hotmail.com>

CC: rmorris@esm.rochester.edu

Subject : Re: Webern studies

I haven't published these analyses--they are items in class handouts I used in a class on Set and Serial Theory. Nevertheless, they present features of both pieces that have not (yet) been published to my knowledge.

The purpose of this paper is to create a basic survey of Webern's life and musical output by reviewing as many authoritative publications on the subject as possible. In the course of this paper, I will attempt to present one or two original musical analyses of my own.

-David M. Shere Santa Barbara, June 2007

II. A brief overview

The foremost authority on Anton Webern's life and works appears to be the late Hans Moldenhauer, by virtue of his establishment of the Webern Archives⁵ and subsequent custodial relationship with Webern's effects. His seminal 1978 biography of Webern,⁶ co-written with his wife Rosaleen, appears to be the most definitive work on Webern available. Some of the periodical information I have encountered in the course of researching this paper appears to conflict with the information in Moldenhauer's biography and other writings. Due to the thoroughness of Moldenhauer's research and extraordinary access to primary sources, when faced with a conflict of information I will defer to the Moldenhauer biography in the interests of accuracy and reliability.

Kathryn Bailey's scholarship on Webern closely follows Moldenhauer. In addition to her own excellent biography of Webern⁷ (which is not as dense as Moldenhauer's, but is nonetheless extremely helpful), she has authored numerous analyses of Webern's compositions, and published (as mentioned in the introduction) what is possibly the most vital piece of analytical information currently available on the subject of Webern's music: an article containing the details of Webern's row

⁵ **The Moldenhauer Archives - The Rosaleen Moldenhauer Memorial: About this Collection.** The Library of Congress: American Memory. 7/15/07.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/moldenhauer/moldintro.html>

⁶ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979.

⁷ Bailey, Kathryn. **The Life of Webern.** Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998.

tables.⁸ Purportedly Webern's autograph tables are coded in colored pencil while the representations are in black-and-white, which presents an obstacle in terms of further analysis of the tables themselves. However, the representations proved to be vital for my analysis of the Variations for Piano Op. 27, as they conveyed Webern's organization and arrangement of the rows accurately enough so that my analytical efforts were indispensably aided. An analysis of the nature which I attempted would likely have been impossible without access to the representations.

Moldenhauer's biography discusses Webern's artistic life according to the traditional classical model of composers, as being demarcated by an Early, Middle, and Late period (or, to be more precise, an Early experimental period divided into two parts: 1) Romantic-influenced, and 2) transitional atonality, and a Later period defined by strict twelve-tone serialism). This is corroborated for the most part by Bailey's biography, and by the numerous other publications which I referenced. However, there is a simpler view also: to paraphrase one of my advisors when questioned on this subject, the answer was "Webern had two important periods-before and after Schoenberg."

From my own perspective, I would state that it appears that Webern's artistic life can be demarcated by the status and nature of his opus and non-opus works. His earliest compositions, most of which went unpublished in his lifetime and are more tonal in nature, comprise the first significant period. The second period is comprised

⁸ Bailey, Katherine. "Webern's row tables." **Webern Studies.** Edited by Kathryn Bailey. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996. pp. 170-228.

of Opp. 1-16, works which are atonal but not yet representative of strict twelve-tone serial technique. The third period is comprised of Opp. 17-31, and represents the apex of Webern's expression of serialism. A fourth and final consideration would be those works that were unfinished; this category includes Webern's projected Op. 32,⁹ which was sketched but never completed, and a number of movements of known works which were discarded for various reasons. It is this four-part model that I will be using to organize my survey of Webern's life and evolution as a composer.

The basic premise of this paper is that a survey of Webern's canon reveals the trajectory of a composer who:

- began his work heavily influenced by the music of Brahms and late Romanticism;
- underwent a pivotal metamorphosis under the influence of Arnold Schoenberg and began experimenting with "free" atonality;
- transitioned into the mature serial technique, and concluded his artistic career as one of the definitive pioneers of modernism and the *avant garde*.

This premise will be borne out by an examination of each distinct period of Webern's life as delineated above, and supported by selected analyses of works from each period.

⁹ Todd, Larry R. **The Genesis of Webern's Opus 32.** *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 4. (Oct., 1980), pp. 581-591.

III. Sketches and Autographs

Webern's sketches represent a crucial reference point for analyzing the composer's later work. Not all of Webern's sketch materials have been recovered; some remain missing, others were destroyed or lost. A number of autographs were recovered directly from Webern's family by Moldenhauer himself. In an article published in February of 1968, Hans Moldenhauer relates the details of his journey to recover Webern's personal effects in October of 1965.¹⁰ Moldenhauer recounts the meeting with Hermine, Webern's daughter-in-law, the recovery of an old broken cello belonging to the composer, a plaster bust, and finally three packages containing the composer's manuscripts:

"The contents of these three packets of manuscripts have now merged into the mainstream of musical history. Before our incredulous eyes there unfolded, in astonishing variety and completeness, Webern's creative *oeuvre* from its beginnings in 1899 up to 1925 when the composer had long attained maturity."¹¹

In addition to these early autographs, there are a total of six sketchbooks documenting Webern's later compositions in the Moldenhauer archives. Facsimiles of a selection of these sketches were published by Carl Fisher, Inc. in the 1960's. Moldenhauer writes,

¹⁰ Moldenhauer, Hans. **A Webern Pilgrimage.** *The Musical Times*, Vol. 109, No. 1500. (Feb., 1968), pp. 122-125+127.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 125.

"The present volume, extracted from these five sketchbooks, contains the drafts of the *unknown* compositions. Included are incipits of works that were never completed as well as movements that were intended for known compositions but were abandoned."¹²

Roger Smalley's three-part review of these sketches¹³ further elaborates on the value of studying Webern's draft materials in understanding Webern's compositional process. Smalley conveys this idea quite poetically in the first review:

"If we analyze a finished work we can learn a great deal about the structure of that work in particular, and about compositional techniques in general. As composition progresses, the musical ideas with which the composer started out begin to develop according to their own inner logic. Eventually the composer is no longer in the position of dictating events but of attempting to discover and follow the logical development which the music itself dictates to him.

By studying the first sketches of a work we learn less about the structure of the work as a whole but more about the composer's own creative processes."¹⁴

Analysis becomes a much more elastic and interpretive tool based on reviewing Webern's multiple revisions of certain works. One example is a study by Allen Forte of Webern's revisions in a single measure of Op. 7 no. 1.¹⁵ According to Forte, "study of the revision process has illuminated portions of the music other than

¹²Moldenhauer, Hans. "Foreword." Webern, Anton von. **Sketches (1926-1945).** Carl Fischer Inc.: New York, 1968.

¹³ Smalley, Roger. Webern's Sketches (I). *Tempo*, New Ser., No. 112. (Mar., 1975). pp. 2-12.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁵ Forte, Allen. **A Major Webern Revision and Its Implications for Analysis.** *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 28, No. 1. (Winter, 1990). pp. 224-255.

the revised passage. Conversely, study of the entire work places the revisions in proper context and enables interpretation of what is often a complex network of relations.¹⁶ Examining the evolution of a single measure of music can aid the analysis of related structures throughout an entire finished piece of music; hence, it is infinitely important to be able to see the evidence of that evolution in the sketchbooks.

Examining individual fragments from Webern's sketches can also illuminate similarities found throughout the entire canon of his work. On plate 18 in the bottom left quadrant is found- in relative isolation to the densely-packed chaos of Webern's other sketch-pages- a row set against its inversion in contrapuntal fashion. On plates 22 and 24, we find further evidence of Webern working out his row permutations in counterpoint [**Fig. 1**]:

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 253.

Figure 1

These row sketches represent evidence in Webern's own handwriting of the implicit contrapuntal and symmetrical nature of his conceptualization of, and approach to, the serial technique. Numerous authors appear to be in agreement that Webern's primary interest in serialism was as a contrapuntal device. Nancy Perloff writes,

"Webern was concerned with the application of laws for ordering and deploying pitches because his primary goal was a motivically unified musical composition. ...According to him, polyphony, particularly imitative counterpoint, was one of the earliest means of achieving unity."¹⁷

The fact that these rows are sketched in quasi-invertible counterpoint emphasizing symmetry and contrary motion, encapsulating the entire formal structure of most of Webern's later works, is confirmation that serialism was less important to Webern for organizing motivic and intervallic content than it was for organizing quasi-traditional voice leading and a choral harmonic underpinning for the music. To elaborate on Smalley's previous statements, it seems evident to me that while Webern may not have *initially* viewed serialism as a means to symmetry and quasi-invertible counterpoint, his aesthetic desires for the technique evolved in that direction until it became more-or-less his entire focus. This hypothesis is supported by Arnold Whittall:

"...[T]he suspicion remains that Webern did not really care very much about the moment-to-moment vertical consequences of set-combination, once a principle had been settled for deciding which sets to combine. For him, it might appear, sticking come-what-may to the fixed linear order in each contrapuntal voice was rationale enough."¹⁸

¹⁷ Perloff, Nancy. **Klee and Webern: Speculations on Modernist Theories of Composition.** *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 2. (Spring, 1983). p. 191.

¹⁸ Whittall, Arnold. Webern and Multiple Meaning. *Music Analysis*, Vol. 6, No. 3. (Oct., 1987). p. 336.

From this statement, it would appear that Whittall agrees with the notion that for Webern, counterpoint took precedence over interval content in determining row construction.

An especially interesting feature found in Webern's sketchbooks and commented on by several analysts is his draft of a "magic square" in the sketches for Op. 24, by which he worked out the fundamental model of a derived series. Perloff mentions the square in the context of a comparison between Webern's serial compositions, and the modernist paintings of Paul Klee.¹⁹ Smalley analyzes the evolution of the derived series, from the magic square to the completed row, step-bystep;²⁰ the final form of the row is as follows [**Fig. 2**]:

Figure 2





And of the finished piece, David Cohen writes, "Although the final passage of Opus 24 is not a strict palindrome- e.g., linear trichords are sometimes reflected by simultaneous forms and rhythmic figures are not reversed-Webern does call attention to the underlying palindromic structure instrumentally."²¹

¹⁹ Perloff, Nancy. **Klee and Webern: Speculations on Modernist Theories of Composition.** *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 2. (Spring, 1983). p. 200.

²⁰ Smalley, Roger. Webern's Sketches (I). *Tempo*, New Ser., No. 112. (Mar., 1975). pp. 2-12.

²¹ Cohen, David. Anton Webern and the Magic Square. *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 13, No. 1. (Autumn - Winter, 1974). pp. 213-215.

Due to the fact that typesetting errors have been discovered in several of Webern's published works,²² confirming the accuracy of the printings is vital to an accurate analysis. I would think that it would be worthwhile to the musicological and theoretical community to seek eventual publication of facsimiles of *all* of Webern's working notes and manuscripts. This sentiment is echoed by George Perle: "It is to be hoped that in time a complete facsimile edition will also make the sketches of the known works available."²³

IV. Webern's Early Life and Compositions

a. Personal Details

"They must have absolutely no notion of what it must mean to perform Beethoven's Ninth...Often I thought- without an exaggeration- that I was about to weep." --Anton von Webern, diary entry after a concert, November 1900²⁴

Anton Friedrich Wilhelm von Webern was born in Vienna, Austria on

December 3, 1883, to father Carl and mother Amalie.²⁵ Owing to his father's career

²² Graubart, Michael. A Webern Note. The Musical Times, Vol. 120, No. 1633. (Mar., 1979). p. 197.

²³ Perle, George. Webern's Twelve-Tone Sketches. *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 1. (Jan., 1971). pp. 1.

²⁴ Bailey, Kathryn. The Life of Webern. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 13.

²⁵ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. p. 33.

in the Ministry of Agriculture,²⁶ the family relocated frequently. He received his elementary education in Vienna and Graz, and "attended the Bundesgymnasium for the full eight years of its humanistic curriculum" in Klagenfurt from 1894 to 1902.²⁷ He received excellent marks in singing, and enjoyed sitting next to his musically educated mother as she played the piano, occasionally trying to play also.²⁸ He developed proficiency as a singer, pianist, and cellist, and first studied theory/composition with Edwin Komauer in Vienna. He developed a great admiration for Strauss, Wagner, Brahms, Mahler, and Beethoven. His closest childhood friend was Ernst Diez, a cousin,²⁹ with whom he carried out a long and informative correspondence.

Webern's diaries make it clear that he preferred the "modern" writers and composers of his own time (such as Karl Hauptmann and Gustav Mahler).³⁰ A letter to Ernst Diez of 22 July, 1901³¹ shows a clear interest in a musical career as a cellist or conductor, but interestingly enough make no mention of composition. In July of 1902, Webern's father took him on a long-awaited pilgrimage to Bayreuth, Germany

²⁶ Ibid, p. 31.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 34.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 36.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 37-38.

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 42-43.

³¹ Ibid, p. 45.

to attend the annual Wagner music festival. That fall, Webern enrolled in Vienna University to study music.³²

b. Works (non-Opus)

Malcolm Hayes informs us, "It is not known for certain exactly how early in his childhood Webern began to compose."³³ Webern's first known compositions are two pieces for cello and piano, written during his residence in Klagenfurt and dated 1899.³⁴ Extremely Chopin-esque pieces, these works are reminiscent of Chopin's Preludes for solo piano, Op. 28, particularly Prelude no. 6 in B minor. A representative excerpt can be seen in **[Fig. 3]**:



³² Ibid, p. 52.

³³ Hayes, Malcolm. Anton Von Webern. Phaidon Press Limited: London, 1995, p. 26.

³⁴ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. p. 59-60.

The cello line is a lovely, singing, voice-like melody, already demonstrating Webern's unique sense of melodic contour that would be one of the defining qualities of his works to come. The piano accompaniment hints at the influences of Brahms, Chopin, and early pan-diatonic Scriabin.

Webern' following compositions during the Klagenfurt period consisted entirely of songs for voice and piano.³⁵ The first of these works is a setting of the poem *Vorfrühling* ("Early Spring") [**Fig. 4**]:





Webern's approach to vocal writing was to help define his melodic approach to almost all future compositions.

The great composers of the German tradition were to exert a lifelong influence on Webern's work. Wagner, Beethoven, and Brahms became three of Webern's central musical deities, as evidenced by writings in his diaries. Bailey states,

³⁵ Hayes, Malcolm. Anton Von Webern. Phaidon Press Limited: London, 1995. p. 27.

"Webern's reverence for Beethoven, already firmly in place at seventeen, would remain a central pillar of his musical life. When he was persuaded to give a series of lectures on musical form thirty years later these would be based largely on structure as handled in the works of Beethoven."³⁶

Webern's lifelong use of variation as a formal device would particularly seem to be indicative of the influence of Beethoven, whose mastery of variation, especially within the context of sonata development, remains unsurpassed.

Understanding the importance of the role of the human voice in Webern's music is essential. Hayes writes,

"In the light of his posthumous deification in the 1950s by the European avant garde as the creator of purely abstract works, it cannot be stressed too strongly that Webern was first and foremost a vocal composer. In every phase of his output- even in the sequence of late masterpieces which became a collective totem for that same avant garde- Webern's vocal works outnumber his purely instrumental ones. In the early 1950s, when much of his music was still unpublished and some of his major works had not yet even been performed, there was arguably some excuse for the misrepresentation of this central aspect of his life's work. In the present age there is none whatever. From the start, composing for the voice was Webern's deepest instinct as a composer. It was to remain so always." ³⁷

It appears that all of Webern's music is in some way informed by aesthetic qualities which are peculiar to the human voice. Much of Webern's instrumental writing can

³⁶ Bailey, Kathryn. **The Life of Webern.** Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 13.

³⁷ Hayes, Malcolm. Anton Von Webern. Phaidon Press Limited: London, 1995. p. 27.

be viewed as linear writing for instrumental voices. Direct comparisons between the linear content of Webern's vocal writing and the linear content of his writing for any other instrument tend to bear out this assertion. Consider the following examples **[Fig. 5-10]**:





There is also consistent evidence of choral writing in all of Webern's music, both instrumental and vocal, throughout Webern's entire output, from his earliest works to Op. 31. This observation is consistent with Webern's educational influences. Hayes writes,

"...[B]esides his regular studies in musical history and theory at the university, Webern was also busy with a kind of work which, unknown to him at the time, was to be the deepest and most lasting influence on his own music. In charge of the Musicological Institute at the university was Professor Guido Adler, an authority on medieval and Renaissance music. Part of Webern's course consisted of lessons in transcribing this music out of the ancient notation in which it was originally written down (which is difficult for non-specialist performers to read) and into the standard modern equivalent."³⁸

Hayes goes on to describe how the distinctions between the techniques of Renaissance choral music and late Romantic instrumental virtuosity help to explain Webern's evolving- and eventually mature- vocabulary. It is clear that, while Webern obviously did not completely reject Romanticism, there are greater similarities between Webern's music and Renaissance choral music, than between Webern's music and Romanticism. To quote Hayes once again, "it is clear that [Webern] already sensed something significant for him in this music, whose distilled style and intricate purity of technique were a world away from the dazzling, feverish musical bazaar that was turn-of-the-century Vienna." ³⁹

The presence of choral writing throughout Webern's body of compositions demonstrates that, as Webern's harmonic and melodic vocabulary became more and more abstract throughout his career due to the influence of Schoenberg and the application of serialism, the application of choral technique in his writing remained

³⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 42.

present but also became more abstract, partially sublimating itself into the background of his writing to become part of the underlying formal architecture.

Furthermore, analysis of Webern's individual compositions which assumes a hypothetical underlying choral structure- even where such a structure is not obvious on the surface- consistently demonstrates that:

- there is valuable information to be gained from studying verticalizations of Webern's pitch sets, even when the spatial association between each pitch class is not blatantly obvious on a surface level within the composition;
- the vertical distribution of pitch classes in Webern's harmonic progressions has an independent identity from the melodic implications of each set; and
- Webern was perfectly aware of traditional voice-leading implications from sonority to sonority, even if he was not always consciously manipulating sonorities as choral structures.

i. Selected Analysis: Piano Quintet (1907)

The posthumously-published Piano Quintet⁴⁰ is in my opinion the composer's most obviously Romantic early piece, heavily influenced by Brahms and Beethoven. Completed approximately three years after Webern began his studies with Arnold Schoenberg, this work represents to me a great enigma. Of this piece, Friedrich Wildgans writes,

⁴⁰ Webern, Anton. **Quintet for Strings and Piano (1907).** Mobart Music Publications, Inc.: Hillsdale, NY, 1977.

"Webern composed the Piano Quintet in 1907 during his lessons with Schoenberg, who believed in asking his pupils to undertake composition exercises based on artistic expression and creative need. Webern thus completed this task, apparently wishing to write a sonata movement in C major for this particular chamber combination. Dr. Josef Polnauer... states that Webern composed the piece in memory of his mother, who had died in 1906."⁴¹

Superbly crafted in its melodic and harmonic chromaticism, wonderfully opulent in its pianistic virtuosity, exquisitely polyphonic in its setting of the string ensemble, and firmly grounded in colorful, Impressionistic tonality, I cannot begin to imagine why Webern never saw fit to publish it in his own lifetime. Perhaps the vocabulary of this piece simply did not fit who he saw himself becoming as a composer.

In any case, the Quintet forms an excellent basis for understanding the tonal context out of which Webern's atonal serial music later evolved. While the chromatic melody gestures and harmonic constructs in this particular work serve as means to a fundamentally *tonal* end, it can be seen that Webern later employed nearly identical harmonic and melodic ideas and constructs in the service of atonal serialism.

The Quintet unabashedly begins and ends in the key of C major, emphasizing several strong G major dominant arrival points. The fascinating means by which Webern explores atonality in this piece include diminished and augmented chord sonorities, Impressionistic chromatic streams of 6ths and 3rds, chromatic pitch collections both harmonic and motivic, and trichord-derived synthetic scales. One gets the sense from the Quintet that here is the first solid evidence of Webern's

⁴¹ Wildgans, Friedrich. **Anton Webern.** Translated by Edith Temple Roberts and Humphrey Searle. Calder and Boyers Ltd.: London, 1966. p. 118.

attempts to break with tonality within the context of tonality- a musical paradox of sorts.

A conventional Roman numeral analysis of the first 28 bars of the piano part definitively establishes the Romantic and functional tonal character of the harmony **[Fig. 11]**:

Figure 11

Piano Quintet (1907)









However, the first string entry, which is the opening statement of the theme by the viola, immediately informs us that the melodic identity of this work is anything but conventional. The antecedent of the theme is in A melodic minor, conforming to the underlying harmonic progression. The consequent, however, casts all harmonic conformity to the wind, deliberately clashing with the piano by means of a chromatic hexachord **[Fig. 12]**:

Figure 12



The entry of the second theme occurs at bar 15: an undulating melodic line based on the motivic trichord [014], first appearing in transposition as [125] against the ii chord in the piano [Fig. 13]:

Figure 13



This motive becomes one of several recurring devices in the Quintet by which Webern explores free atonality throughout, while retaining a tonal reference point. The advantage of this trichord is that it acts both atonally *and* quasi-tonally, as the leading tone/root/third of a melodic minor sonority. An especially significant reworking of this motive occurs at measure 178, where Webern uses the [014] trichord to construct a synthetic scale as the basis of a short cadential passage in the piano. Support for the hypothesis that Webern employs this trichord quasi-tonally is found in measure 182, where we find the variation [780] of the trichord, a semitone alteration of the intervallic content briefly suggesting a major-key sonority [**Fig. 14**]:


In the next excerpt, we find employment of the chromatic motives [5423], [9867], and [6534], which are transpositions of the segment [BA89] in the opening hexachord [10BA89] of the first theme. Already it is clear, even at this early stage of his composing, that motivically Webern is thinking in terms of many of the combinatorial and derivative processes upon which he would later build his mature serial technique. However, the primary harmonic convergence of the strings in this passage is the diminished trichord [B28]. While Webern thoroughly explores prototypical serial procedures in the motivic content of the Quintet, the tonallyreferential harmony in this specific passage demonstrates that he has not yet achieved the harmonic and motivic unity which would later become the cornerstone of his



serial compositions [Fig. 15]:

The final measures of the Quintet can be seen to cadence brazenly in C major, in a gestural manner strongly reminiscent of Brahms, bringing the tonal underpinning of the work full circle [Fig. 16]:



In effect, Webern establishes a tonally functional harmonic context in the Quintet which is immediately but subtly violated by the chromatic consequent of the first theme, and which is then further called into question by the ambiguous trichord motive of the second theme. Webern then spends much of the work exploring atonal melodic ideas while retaining a tonal harmonic structure, moving as far as possible away from functionality without abandoning it completely. While not nearly as sophisticated or complex as Webern's later serial works, this piece showcases a tremendous amount of raw talent, a youthful enthusiasm for Romantic drama, and solid evidence of Webern's immersion in the traditions of German music. It stands on

its own merits as a significant chamber work that deserves inclusion in the Webern canon.

V. Webern's Middle Life and Compositions

a. Personal details

"When men begin to earn a living and become involved with external things, they become empty."

--Webern, in a letter to Schoenberg, 24 December 1910 $^{\rm 42}$

Webern began his studies with Arnold Schoenberg in Vienna, in the fall of 1904.⁴³ It was during this period that Webern, along with his mentor and fellow students, began exploring "free" atonality. Willi Reich writes, "In 1910 Webern, simultaneously with Schonberg and Alban Berg, finally freed himself from the ties of tonality."⁴⁴ Upon completion of his Ph.D., Webern began to exhibit certain signs of personal instability. He remained in Vienna to study with Schoenberg for two more years, accepting various jobs and resigning them abruptly, often under extreme duress. Bailey writes,

"The pattern of Webern's life during this period was determined almost entirely by his obsessive devotion to Schoenberg and his desire to be near him. This adoration

⁴² Bailey, Kathryn. **The Life of Webern.** Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 52.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 36.

⁴⁴ Reich, Willi. Anton Webern: The Man and His Music. *Tempo*, No. 14. (Mar., 1946). p. 9.

led him to act in such an irresponsible way that even Schoenberg was often exasperated."⁴⁵

Webern's devotion to his mentor Schoenberg bordered on the obsessive. He expressed affection for Schoenberg akin to the adulation the apostles held for Jesus Christ. A letter from Webern to Schoenberg in 1911 reads in part, "I believe that the disciples of Jesus Christ could not have felt more deeply for their Lord than we for you."⁴⁶

Webern married his first cousin Wilhelmine, a childhood sweetheart, in February of 1911;⁴⁷ his bride was premaritally pregnant with their first daughter, Amalie, a situation which caused some consternation for both their families. In May of that year Webern, Schoenberg and their mutual circle attended the funeral of Gustav Mahler as guests of honor.

Webern began to suffer bouts of acute depression, which interfered with his work as a conductor and prevented him from fulfilling or accepting various jobs.⁴⁸ He relocated often throughout this period, to accept work or remain near family or friends, particularly Schoenberg. He managed to continue his composing throughout his personal health issues, family difficulties, and financial struggles.

⁴⁵ Bailey, Kathryn. **The Life of Webern.** Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 52.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 53.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 58.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 62-67.

During the First World War, Webern trained as a male nurse, and enlisted in the Austria-Hungarian Army in February 1915, in a non-combat infantry capacity, receiving several minor promotions.⁴⁹ By December 1915, Webern had taken leave from his army post. He rejoined in January 1916, and was given the task of training new recruits, a job which was well-suited to his excellent physical fitness from a lifetime pursuit of mountain hiking.⁵⁰ Webern's poor eyesight protected him from combat service. Bailey writes, "On 23 December [1916] Webern received a permanent discharge from military service, having been deemed unfit for service at the front because of short-sightedness."⁵¹

On November 23, 1918, Schoenberg along with Webern, Berg and several others founded the Society for Private Musical Performances. The purpose of the Society was to provide a "venue for the performance of new works before a private audience from which critics were excluded."⁵² In 1921, with Schoenberg having lost interest, the Society opened itself to the general public and effectively ceased to exist.⁵³ In February of 1923, Schoenberg unveiled the 12-tone technique to his students in a private seminar, chronologically establishing precedence over Joseph Hauer, who had been exploring a similar technique independently of Schoenberg and who was perceived as competing for primacy.

⁴⁹ Hayes, Malcolm. Anton Von Webern. Phaidon Press Limited: London, 1995. pp. 116-122.
⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 123.

⁵¹ Bailey, Kathryn. **The Life of Webern.** Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 88.

⁵² Ibid, p. 96.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 99.

Webern's diary entries from 1923 through 1931 are his most extensive surviving documents of daily life; from them we get a picture of greater personal stability and responsibility evolving out of the tumult of his early years.⁵⁴ He enjoyed a much more successful conducting career than previously, and began his teaching career in earnest.

b. Works Opp. 1-16

Webern completed Opp. 1-10 by the time of his arrival in Berlin in October of 1911.⁵⁵ The last piece from this time, Three Pieces for Cello and Piano Op. 11, was written in 1914.⁵⁶ Due to his respective involvements with WWI and with the Society for Private Musical Performances, from 1914 to 1922 Webern produced just four new works with opus numbers, Opp. 12-15, all of which were song settings for voice and various instrumentations. During this time Webern produced only a few unfinished sketches of instrumental music, including four movements for string quartet.⁵⁷ The last set of songs from this period, Op. 16, was completed in autumn of 1924.⁵⁸ All of the Opp. 1-16 works were written using a language of free chromaticism that blurred the distinction between tonality and atonality. The works from these pieces explore a

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 103.

⁵⁵ Bailey, Kathryn. The Life of Webern. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 74.

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 77-78.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 100-101.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 119.

vast palette of non-ordered pitch sets, synthetic and symmetrical scales, and pretwelve-tone serial techniques using ordered-set permutations.

Willi Reich provides an excellent capsular summary of Webern's career in a brief article dated shortly after the composer's death. Of Webern's works completed and in print at the time of publication, Reich states,

"The published list commences with a large composition for orchestra, the Passacaglia Op. 1 (1908), written after a long and strict study with Arnold Schonberg. It shows the twenty-five-year-old composer in complete command of all the traditional means of his art. Even this work, clearly influenced by Brahms's late style, betrays a peculiar originality, wrestling for its own means of expression in its melodic invention and its endeavour to expand tonality to the uttermost."⁵⁹

Webern's approach to composing music was anything but a dry academic exercise. He spent many hours- much like Beethoven- lost in deep musical thought during regular, vigorous mountain hiking excursions, which he pursued to escape his many distractions. Despite the mathematical rigors of the twelve-tone technique, Webern drew inspiration from numerous sources, both in his personal life and from his interests in literature and poetry. Nancy Perloff writes, "A closer study of [his] sketches reveals that many of Webern's works were inspired by literary programs."⁶⁰ This is obvious of Webern's numerous song cycles, but it is also evident in his instrumental works as well.

⁵⁹ Reich, Willi. Anton Webern: The Man and His Music. *Tempo*, No. 14. (Mar., 1946). p. 8.

⁶⁰ Perloff, Nancy. **Klee and Webern: Speculations on Modernist Theories of Composition.** *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 2. (Spring, 1983). p. 201.

While Webern's mature serial compositions display the perfection of his technical abilities, evidence of the prototypes of those techniques can be found throughout his free atonal works. An example is his use of a derived series, which has several precedents in his earlier works. Christopher Wintle points out that evidence of series derivation is found as early as Op. 11:

"Whilst the *locus classicus* of derivational procedures is to be found in the Concerto [Op. 24], an earlier, tentative experiment with them occurs in the third of Webern's pieces for cello and piano, Op.11 (Ex. 1); this was composed as early as 1914."⁶¹

I would argue that evidence of series derivation can be found as early as the fourth movement of Op. 6.

i. Selected Analysis: Six Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 6

Webern's Six pieces for Orchestra are considered "perhaps his most programmatic work."⁶² Written directly in the wake of his mother Amalie's death, they are in Webern's own words "of a purely lyrical nature";⁶³ they were premiered in Vienna on March 31st, 1913 under the direction of Arnold Schoenberg.⁶⁴ The first

⁶¹ Wintle, Christopher. An Early Version of Derivation: Webern's Op. 11/3. *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 13, No. 2. (Spring - Summer, 1975), pp. 167.

⁶² Baker, James M. Coherence in Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra Op. 6. *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 4. (Spring, 1982), p. 1.

⁶³ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. p. 128.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

movement originally carried the designation of *Langsam, marcia funebre,* which was later removed. In a letter to Schoenberg, Webern wrote:

"The first piece is to express my frame of mind when I was still in Vienna, already sensing the disaster, yet always maintaining the hope that I would find my mother still alive."⁶⁵

James Baker delivers a thorough and in-depth analysis of Op. 6, in which he states,

"Webern's technique of pc-set correspondences has immense consequences with regard to musical form. On the largest level, of course, the set of pieces is extraordinarily unified. Virtually every moment in the piece alludes to at least one corresponding moment elsewhere in the set. This process is intimately bound together with the program, reflecting the countless associations, memories, and emotions the composer experiences as he relives the events surrounding his mother's death."⁶⁶

Op. 6 was written prior to Webern's maturely-developed explorations of serialism, and appears to be based on a number of cross-related pc-sets,⁶⁷ which include the following [**Fig. 17**]:

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 126.

⁶⁶ Baker, James M. Coherence in Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra Op. 6. *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 4. (Spring, 1982). p. 24.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 4-7.



Webern's orchestrations in this piece are lush and Romantic. There are some extremely striking thematic moments in each movement that, while singular and unrepeated, convey an immediate sense of definition and reference on the first listening, as if one has heard them before. The celesta provides an aura of surrealism and mystery in the opening bars of the first movement, following close on the heels of the first flute passage **[Fig. 18]**:

Figure 18



While this gesture is brief and solitary, it creates a sensation of infinite space, as if the chords continue to resonate and echo long after their decay. The celesta ends the

movement in the same surreal mood, with a quick glissando spanning nearly the entire range of the instrument. These two gestures taken together convey a sense of Impressionistic harmony and color adapted to Webern's characteristically concise vocabulary, and a concern with gesture and texture drawn from emotion rather than process.

The second movement is best defined by a simple and elegant parallel melody in the two flutes [Fig. 19]:



The E natural and G natural pivot notes briefly convey a sense of neo-Classicism that is reminiscent of Beethoven. The flute colors set against a rather frantic accompaniment in the strings create a sense of profound calm and purpose, floating tranquilly above an overwhelming tumult of emotional upheaval. This gesture strongly conveys the programmatic sense of Webern's feelings of loss for his mother being expressed therein, coupled perhaps with an allusion to his efforts to mask his grief and maintain an appearance of acceptance.

The atmosphere and orchestration of these pieces appears to have greatly influenced certain cinematic composers. The third movement sounds unavoidably

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similar to a number of cues from the score of the 1982 movie "Poltergeist", composed by Jerry Goldsmith,⁶⁸ leading to the obvious conclusion that Goldsmith was likely heavily influenced by Webern. Opening with a brief but compellingly sweet oration by the viola, followed by a cascade in the clarinet and punctuated by a brief string chord, we arrive at another elegant unison line **[Fig. 20]**:





This line is poignantly reminiscent of Ravel, having a lullaby-like quality and once again conveying a quality of Impressionism. The childlike aspect of this theme, the choice of instrumentation, and the underlying orchestration are all reflected in Goldsmith's "Poltergeist" cues. This is a fascinating comparison to draw, as "Poltergeist" was essentially a ghost story and Op. 6 is programmatic music about Webern's departed mother. There is no question in my mind that Goldsmith drew influence from this specific work; however, as Goldsmith passed away in July 2004, there is no confirming this speculation unless he discussed it in an interview.

The fourth movement has a distinctly theatrical, operatic feeling of drama. The percussion plays a key part, defining a ternary form (ABA') by opening and

⁶⁸ Jerry Goldsmith. The Internet Movie Database. 7/18/07.

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000025/>

closing with a prolonged roll on the bass drum, the midsection punctuated by a brief flourish on the snare. A harmonic declaration which is broken up between the winds and brass from mm. 7-11 is unified in the final four measures 37-40. The piccolo states the main theme [Fig. 21]:



In this theme and the answering statements from the clarinet, horn and trumpet, we see strong evidence that Webern was already working out the components of the derived series technique even earlier than Op. 11. In mm. 11-14 we find the ordered trichord [102] in the opening of the line, in transposition as [657], followed by the transposed inversion [354] which is built into the close of the line [**Fig. 22**]:



Subsequently in mm. 19-26, we also find the retrograde [423] of the ordered trichord stated in the clarinet, and the retrograde-inversion [021] in the trumpet concludes the passage [Fig. 23]:



The presence of another trichord [167] and its transposed retrograde [872] in this passage shows that the analysis is an accurate assessment of Webern's intentions. While there is not a complete aggregate stated by the combined trichords alone, and there are several overlaps of pitch class between permutations, the fact that all four permutations of an ordered trichord are present in a single polyphonic passage is evidence to me that Webern was already thinking through the particulars of a derived series, and was experimenting with the building blocks necessary for eventually solving the problem.

The fifth movement of Op. 6 creates the impression of an entire multimovement symphonic form in and of itself, demonstrating once again Webern's adeptness at creating maximum expressive gestures within the confines of a minimal musical space. The movement is constructed of three distinct sections. The first section is comprised of mm. 1-18, the second section mm.19-21, and the last section mm. 21-26. Following a quiet opening oration from the trumpet, we find linear fragments passed around among the trumpet and the winds [**Fig. 24**]:



This passage is notable for the fact that every pitch class is represented except [3]there is no D# or Eb present. The absence of Eb is resolved following this passage via a tritone harmony in the second violin, at measure 17 [**Fig. 25**]:



The second section is an almost calliope-like triplet figure, stated by the trumpets, celesta, harp, and glockenspiel [Fig. 26]:

Figure 25



The third section of this movement features a solo violin line, supported by a dense wall of harmonics in the rest of the strings, and colored by quiet brass harmonies grounded by the bassoon.

The sixth and final movement closes with a brief violin solo, which is followed by a colorful passage of lush chords in the celesta **[Fig. 27]**:





This event effectively creates a bookend effect with the opening flute solo and celesta response from the very first movement, and bringing the entire work full cycle. Baker masterfully summarizes the tone of Op. 6 in the following statements:

"Thus it appears that two figures loom over the structure of Webern's Six Pieces: his mother and Arnold Schoenberg. Certainly the presence of the mother is felt in the continually varied textures at the surface of the music, where the emotional content of the composition is conveyed; while the master presides over the cerebral dimension of pc-set relations."⁶⁹

c. Works Opp. 17-31

From 1923 onward, Webern explored the twelve-tone technique, beginning with the posthumously-published 1924 *Kinderstück* for solo piano, and continuing in 1925 with six more songs Op. 17 and 18, and two choruses Op. 19. With the Trio for Strings Op. 20 completed in 1927, Webern finally proved mastery of all the possibilities of twelve-tone serialism.⁷⁰ Of the defining *aesthetic* characteristics of Webern's serial music, Bailey articulates as follows:

- "Pointillism is a feature of all Webern's twelve-note works."
- "Two predispositions that consistently shape Webern's twelve-note writing are his propensity for canon and his fascination with symmetry."⁷¹

Webern's body of work from Op. 17 forward represents the height of his expression of the serial aesthetic. His approach to music at this point had achieved a level of complete artistic and technical integration. The degree of complexity which

⁶⁹ Baker, James M. Coherence in Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra Op. 6. *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 4. (Spring, 1982). p. 27.

⁷⁰ Bailey, Kathryn. The Life of Webern. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 99.

⁷¹ Ibid, pp.127-128.

Webern exhibits is summed up beautifully by Bailey: "Webern's inclination to conceal is an important factor in the listener's difficulty in coming to terms with his twelve-note music."⁷² Of this compositional period, Robert Nelson writes, "[Webern's] iconoclastic attitude is clearly revealed in three important variation cycles, written when he was at the height of his powers. These are the second movement of the Symphony for small Orchestra, Op. 21 (1928); the Variations for Piano, Op. 27 (1936); and the Variations for Orchestra, Op. 30 (1940)."⁷³

Serialism was not without its hazards for Webern and his contemporaries. Writer Paul Kabbash explains the complication of serialism in the following terms: "Abandoning [tonality] greatly diminished the cohesiveness of pitch relationships since these could no longer be referred to principles outside the composition."⁷⁴ It required enormous effort and extraordinary inventiveness on Webern's behalf to overcome the breach in formal structure which had opened up between the materials of tonality and atonality. In a paradoxical fashion, Webern overcame the formal problems of serialism through an even *more* thorough and rigorous reliance on, and application of, traditional forms. Wallace McKenzie writes,

⁷² Ibid, p. 128.

⁷³ Nelson, Robert U. Webern's Path to the Serial Variation. *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 7, No.
2. (Spring - Summer, 1969). p. 73.

⁷⁴ Kabbash, Paul; Anton Webern. Aggregate-Derived Symmetry in Webern's "Early Works". *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 28, No. 2. (Autumn, 1984). p. 225.

"That Webern valued highly pre-existing forms, schemes, and devices is clearly indicated by his continuous use of them throughout his music, and, of these, his concern with varieties of imitation is perhaps the most strongly evident."⁷⁵

Furthermore, we see in Webern's sketches the evidence of how he solved many of the differences between tonality and atonality predominantly through symmetry and choral devices.

Kabbash's argument seems to be that the historical precedent of *harmonic progression* in tonal music is replaced by *rhythmic structure* in the formal designs of serial atonality. He states, "Form in these works is unified, then, not by pitch alone but by duration and pitch combined."⁷⁶ While I appreciate the merit of this argument, I do not completely agree with it- any length of time spent studying Webern's music demonstrates that harmonic progression is, if anything, *more* important in the fabric of atonal music than it was in tonal music, and that furthermore the harmonic progression is defined independently of the rhythmic qualities of the music. The harmony involved is doubtless more complex and of a completely different quality, but it is essential all the same.

Webern's concern with symmetry became a defining feature of his later music. George Rochberg writes, "Symmetry forms the syntactical basis of much of Webern's musical thought. As symmetry implies regulation of proportion, balance

⁷⁵ McKenzie, Wallace. "Webern's Technique of Choral Composition." Anton von Webern: Perspectives. Compiled by Hans Moldenhauer; Edited by Demar Irvine. University of Washington Press: Seattle, WA, 1966. p. 64.

⁷⁶Kabbash, Paul; Anton Webern. Aggregate-Derived Symmetry in Webern's "Early Works". *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 28, No. 2. (Autumn, 1984). p. 226.

and unity of pattern and design, it is not surprising that Webern should have been so powerfully drawn to its logic."⁷⁷ George Perle describes Webern's use of canon as a device for formal symmetry:

"In Webern's twelve-tone works the musical material does not unfold in terms of "principal parts," "secondary parts," and "accompaniments." Nothing can "retire into the background" because there is no "background." Canon, which by definition eliminates hierarchically differentiated strata and the dichotomy of "thematic" and "nonthematic," was to be the governing principle of every work of Webern's from the Symphony onwards."⁷⁸

Webern managed to create symmetry even in works based on source rows which were not in and of themselves symmetrical. In an analysis of Op. 23 no. 1 and a preliminary discussion of the row, Brian Alegant states "What makes it unique among all of Webern's rows is its apparent lack of symmetry".⁷⁹ Alegant goes on to illuminate the techniques by which Webern managed to extract symmetry from even this row via combinations of its various permutations. The evidence throughout Webern's music shows that the composer was able to find symmetrical structural devices where none may have been readily apparent.

⁷⁷ Rochberg, George. **Webern's Search for Harmonic Identity.** *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 1. (Spring, 1962). p. 110.

⁷⁸ Perle, George. Webern's Twelve-Tone Sketches. *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 1. (Jan., 1971), pp. 6-7.

⁷⁹ Alegant, Brian. A Model for the Pitch Structure of Webern's Op. 23 No. 1, "Das dunkle Herz". *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 13, No. 2. (Autumn, 1991). p. 128.

Multi-level symmetry became Webern's mechanism for contriving musical unity in his compositions on every possible temporal level, from local events to the entire formal structure, in an almost neo-Schenkerian fashion. In her comparative analysis of Webern and Klee, Perloff observes that Webern "applied contrapuntal techniques and variation procedures to a minimal amount of material in order to achieve compositional unity", that Webern never "ventured entirely into the realm of the abstract", and that Webern "derived [his] theories of art from the scientific theories of Goethe."⁸⁰ These observations support the assertion that Webern used symmetry in serialism to bridge the formal gap left by the absence of tonality.

i. Selected Works

1. String Trio, Op. 20

Webern's string trio, Op. 20 is considered perhaps his most aurally obscure piece. "From the listener's point of view it is- speaking generally- easier to comprehend the structure of the works following Op. 21 than those immediately preceding it."⁸¹ This observation is supported by the complexity of the Op. 20 series. The source row is combinatorial, combining a hexachord with its inversion [**Fig. 28**]:

⁸⁰ Perloff, Nancy. **Klee and Webern: Speculations on Modernist Theories of Composition.** *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 69, No. 2. (Spring, 1983). p. 201.

⁸¹ Smalley, Roger. Webern's Sketches (III). Tempo, New Ser., No. 114. (Sep., 1975). p. 18.



Smalley's observations on the sketches for Op. 20 verify perhaps the single greatest frustration faced by historians and analysts when dealing with the enigmatic underlying structures of Webern's music: the fact that some of Webern's autographs and sketches have gone missing.

"Webern began to use his first sketchbook during the composition of this Trio, and the sketches for the two published movements, which were written on loose sheets of manuscript paper, have unfortunately not been found."⁸²

It is of particular interest to me that not all of Webern's sketches and autographs have been accounted for. Not only does this raise the question of what ultimately happened to these artifacts, but it also leaves permanent doubts about using any potentially unconventional analytical approaches. If an analysis can neither be confirmed nor denied by the composer's autograph materials, then the veracity of that analysis remains in a state of perpetual indeterminacy.

A widely-discussed detail about Op. 20 is the number of movements that appear in the completed version. Apparently Webern had originally intended to write three movements, but eventually discarded one, completing only two. The completed

⁸² Ibid, p. 15.

first movement was actually finished last, and intended to be the third movement. The number of movements is of concern when trying to reconstruct the process which led to the completed formal structure. The speculation is that "Webern might well have left the third movement unfinished because he realized that he would end up with three movements (in whatever order) of too similar character."⁸³

2. Symphony, Op. 21

Webern's Symphony Op. 21 is considered to be possibly his most definitive serial work, encapsulating his entire aesthetic palette of counterpoint, symmetry, palindrome, pointillism, and concision of musical thought. Bailey states, "This work is a brilliant *tour de force* of simultaneous horizontal and vertical symmetries (mirrors and palindromes) unfolding through a series of double canons."⁸⁴ The source row is symmetrical, based on a combinatorial hexachord and its' retrograde.⁸⁵ Lejaren Hiller and Ramon Fuller further elaborate that "the second half of the tone row used in this composition is the retrograde form of the first half, transposed an augmented fourth"⁸⁶ [Fig. 29]:

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Bailey, Kathryn. The Life of Webern. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 128.

⁸⁵ Bailey, Katherine. "Webern's row tables." **Webern Studies.** Edited by Kathryn Bailey. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996. p. 186.

⁸⁶ Hiller, Lejaren and Ramon Fuller. **Structure and Information in Webern's Symphonie, Op. 21.** *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 11, No. 1. (Spring, 1967), p. 62.

Op. 21, mvmt. I- source row



Webern began sketching this piece sometime in November of 1927. It was completed near the beginning of September 1928, and "premiered in New York's Town Hall on 18 December 1929."⁸⁷ Moldenhauer relates, "The Symphony, Op. 21, constitutes a milestone in the development of serial technique. A generation later, Webern's rigid application of row patterns in this work was to have enormous influence on his followers, who saw in his example the point of departure for their own ideal of complete predetermination of all structural elements."⁸⁸

Not only is the source row palindromic, but the second movement is formally constructed as one large palindrome, running in retrograde from approximately mm 50 to the end.⁸⁹ In addition, the canonic structure and voice motion are perfectly symmetrical, moving in direct inversion voice against voice; Hiller and Fuller present a number of excellent reductive diagrams of the harmonic content of this symphony.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. pp 324-326.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 326.

⁸⁹ Hitchcock, H. Wiley. A Footnote on Webern's Variations. *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 8, No. 2. (Spring - Summer, 1970), pp. 123-126.

⁹⁰ Hiller, Lejaren and Ramon Fuller. **Structure and Information in Webern's Symphonie, Op. 21.** *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 11, No. 1. (Spring, 1967), pp. 64-67.

A typical example of contrapuntal symmetry can be found in movement I, mm. 9-15, between the viola and cello [Fig. 30]:



Another interesting feature of this work is the apparently static nature of its harmonic language. According to Julian Johnson, "the whole of the exposition (bars 1-25a) outlines a static harmonic field in which each of the twelve pitch classes is heard only in a fixed and unchanging registral position."⁹¹ Johnson provides A as the central pitch axis of this harmonic field.

According to writer Donna Lynn, Webern's sketches indicate that the composer intended to first create a melodic opening theme for Op. 21, and derive the series of the piece from the theme, rather than first establishing a series and then

⁹¹ Johnson, Julian. Webern and the Transformation of Nature. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1999. p. 204.

creating a theme from the series.⁹² The series is ultimately derived from the variation theme of the symphony. Apparently it took numerous drafts for Webern to work out the thematic material and the subsequent tone rows, as evidenced by the dates on his sketches. "The placement of these dates suggests that for Webern the precompositional work on the symphony involved not simply devising a series, but also the theme as a functional definition of that series. And in documenting so meticulously his precompositional process, he offered us a privileged glimpse of how he realized the form-defining potential of the 12-tone method."⁹³

3. Quartet, Op. 22

It is particularly interesting to learn about Webern's sketch notes for the Quartet, Op. 22 (for tenor saxophone, violin, clarinet and piano) in light of what they reveal about his spiritual state while composing the piece. For a composer who appeared to be coldly obsessed with technical details, the sketch notes for this composition reveal a genuinely poetic side of Webern which is generally overlooked. This revelation can be added to the evidence of deep emotional outpouring in the creation of Op. 6, in order to rebut the oft-heard and ill-informed assumption that Webern's music is somehow dryly academic. Smalley writes that Op. 22 "like the Concerto Op.24, was inspired by (and presumably during) Webern's walking tours in

⁹² Lynn, Donna. 12-Tone Symmetry: Webern's Thematic Sketches for the Sinfonie, Op. 21, Second Movement. *The Musical Times*, Vol. 131, No. 1774. (Dec., 1990), p. 644.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 646.

the Carinthian Alps."⁹⁴ Webern's description of one of the secondary themes reads: "Cosy, warm, sphere of the highest pastures."⁹⁵ Whatever Webern may have felt during his compositional process, he was certainly not detached or remote in any way:

"The fact that Webern's music has profoundly influenced the work of so many of the composers who have followed him and has, over recent years, withstood so much detailed analysis, is surely no accident. These sketches reveal, perhaps more clearly than we have been able to see before, the subtlety and complexity of his craftsmanship. But they also show that for Webern this painstakingly achieved perfection was not an end in itself, but was only a means of embodying the primary source of his inspiration, which was a vision of the unity and interdependence of man and nature."⁹⁶

The source row for this work is asymmetrical, constructed of one hexachord comprised of two minor 3^{rds} and a major 3rd related by minor seconds, and a second hexachord comprised of a chromatic tetrachord and a perfect 4th, related by a tritone **[Fig. 31]**:

Figure 31



⁹⁴ Smalley, Roger. Webern's Sketches (II). Tempo, New Ser., No. 113. (Jun., 1975), pp. 29.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Smalley, Roger. Webern's Sketches (III). Tempo, New Ser., No. 114. (Sep., 1975), p. 21.

A particularly interesting observation by Smalley is the fact that the movements of Op. 22 were composed in reverse order.⁹⁷ The third movement was in fact the first to be composed. Smalley states,

"This suggests that for Webern-unlike Schoenberg-the thematic significance of particular forms and transpositions of the set was not crucial. Far more important were the relationships created between the sets used within each separate movement."⁹⁸

The hypothesis that relationships between series permutations were of more importance than the construction of the series themselves supports the observation I made earlier in this paper regarding Webern's sketches: Webern's interest in serialism apparently was driven more by an interest in counterpoint than an interest in the intervallic and motivic content of each series. According to Smalley's analysis, Webern's sketches make it clear that intersection of, and mapping between, rowforms was of utmost concern to Webern in Op. 22.

George Perle analyzes Webern's somewhat cryptic application of the series in Op. 22, no. 2, as a method of partitioning. "In the second movement, for example, several episodes are based on recurrent figures generated by an ingenious partitioning

⁹⁷ Smalley, Roger. Webern's Sketches (II). Tempo, New Ser., No. 113. (Jun., 1975), p. 30.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 31.

of paired row forms".⁹⁹ This analysis lends further support to a cryptic analytical approach to Op. 27 III.¹⁰⁰

ii. Selected Analysis: Variations for solo piano, Opus 27

Webern's Variations for Piano, Op. 27, was the last work published by Universal Edition (in 1937) during his lifetime¹⁰¹ (his last work actually published was Op. 28,¹⁰² by Boosey & Hawkes in 1939).¹⁰³ The work was premiered on October 26, 1937 in Vienna, by pianist Peter Stadlen.¹⁰⁴ Nelson states, "[c]ompleted in 1936, and frequently performed since World War II, [Op. 27] has become the object of numerous special studies, many of them elaborately technical and detailed."¹⁰⁵ The formal structure of the work as a whole, and the three movements as related to one another, is heavily debated. Bailey writes,

"Op.27 appears to me to be a conundrum. Three interpretations seem all to be justified. It is a three movement sonata with traditionally precedented structures in all

⁹⁹ Perle, George. Webern's Twelve-Tone Sketches. *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 1. (Jan., 1971), pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 32.

¹⁰¹ Bailey, Kathryn. **The Life of Webern.** Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 152.

¹⁰² Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. p. 494.

¹⁰³ Bailey, Kathryn. **The Life of Webern.** Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 152.

¹⁰⁴ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. p. 473.

¹⁰⁵ Nelson, Robert U. Webern's Path to the Serial Variation. *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 7, No.
2. (Spring - Summer, 1969). p. 82.

three positions--sonata, binary, scherzo, and variation-but is nowhere so designated by Webern. At the same time it is a suite, again with movements conforming to structures customary in that situation-ternary, binary and variation-and with the authority of Webern's own designation in private. Finally, the official title seems to indicate variations of a curious sort, in which two movements of three seem to have very little to do with variations form, although all represent varied applications of symmetry."¹⁰⁶

Webern himself likened the Variations to an intermezzo by Brahms,¹⁰⁷ with the implication that they were meant to sound improvisatory.

a. Mvmt. I

To re-state a previous point, a purely harmonic reduction of Op. 27 I [Fig. 32] demonstrates that Webern was at least *aware* of choral-like structures and voice-leading between sonorities, even if he was not consciously manipulating these features. A meta-choral structure is particularly evident in the contrary motion present in the outer voices of each harmonic collection. It is possible that these techniques were so ingrained in Webern due to a lifetime of study that they were completely sublimated, and he was applying them subconsciously. In view of Webern's meticulous attention to formal structure and counterpoint, however, it is doubtful that Webern was not actively controlling the harmonic underpinnings of his work on some conscious level.

¹⁰⁶ Bailey, Kathryn. **Willi Reich's Webern.** *Tempo*, New Ser., No. 165, Émigrés and 'Internal Exiles'. (Jun., 1988). p. 22.

¹⁰⁷ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. p. 483.

Op. 27, mvmt. I- harmonic reduction



In reviewing notes from a series of private lectures given by Webern in Vienna in 1932-3, Peter Stadlen writes, "The truly sensational news emerges from these pages that notwithstanding his radical convictions, it was Webern's belief that there is tonal as well as serial significance in the vertical aspect of his music."¹⁰⁸ This revelation from Webern himself has rather interesting implications when one isolates the top two voices from the choral reduction of movement I for meta-analytical

¹⁰⁸ Stadlen, Peter. The Webern Legend. The Musical Times, Vol. 101, No. 1413. (Nov., 1960). p. 695.

purposes. A clear suggestion of D minor emerges up until approximately measure 18 [Fig. 33]:

Figure 33



While I would hardly make the argument that Op. 27 I is even remotely tonal, or could be construed as being somehow *literally* in D minor, the fact is that there are subtle tonal- or, more accurately, polytonal- connotations in the harmonic structure of the first movement that should not be overlooked.

b. Mvmt. II

In this movement, contrary motion is an indispensable component of the harmonic architecture of the music [Fig. 34]:





Op. 27, mvmt. II- harmonic reduction



Here we see a literal presentation of the invertible counterpoint evidenced in Webern's row sketches. Wilbur Ogdon writes,

"More basic than the serial method was Webern's adherence to a strict mirror principle. It should be noted that this mirror principle does not merely reflect the methodology of apposing original and inverted forms of the series, but is a substructural phenomenon dependent upon a pitch system of precise tonal logic."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Ogdon, Wilbur. **A Webern Analysis.** *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 1. (Spring, 1962). p. 136.

Furthermore, the harmonic reduction clearly shows that an underlying choral structure is anything but speculative- it is the backbone of the movement's compositional integrity.

David Lewin examines the complexity of the metric scheme in this movement,¹¹⁰ and conjectures that while the indicated meter is 2/4, when performed the movement is actually heard in 3/8 by the listener. This appears to in fact be the case, and Lewin present a number of proposals for this being so, offering the following as the most likely explanation:

"The piece is (in some sense) in 2/4, and performers exist who can project the meter, but the mode of metric hearing in the piece is radically different from previous modes of metric hearing; hence, a listener who is unfamiliar with the piece (and a fortiori with its novel treatment of meter) will listen in terms of his received notions of meter. In those terms the piece seems to be in 3/8."

While this seems to be a reasonable theory, I would venture to suggest that the apparent conflict between the written and perceived meter is actually simpler than this. Is it conceivable that the movement is polyrhythmic or cross-rhythmic in some sense? I propose that it is, and that Webern intended for the listener to hear the movement in both 2/4 *and* 3/8 simultaneously, much like the cross-rhythmic pulses of certain later minimalist composers such as Steve Reich and Phillip Glass. A brief audit of Reich's "Piano Phase" lends credence to this proposal.

¹¹⁰ Lewin, David. A Metrical Problem in Webern's Op. 27. *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 1. (Spring, 1962), pp. 124-132.

c. Mvmt. III

The third movement of Op. 27 can be analyzed by an intricate row partitioning schematic. In addition, I would like to introduce the concept of **index analysis** to this movement, in order to make a little more sense out of the partitioning strategy that Webern uses. **Index analysis** is not without precedent, as I will show by the work of Westergaard and Morris, and it presents an excellent device by which to elaborate on the details of especially complicated partitioning patterns, such as those Webern presents us with in Op. 27 III.

Every ordered set has an index sequence derived from the number (n) of elements in the set. Each element in the set can be assigned an **index value (iv)**, which can be expressed [0,1,2...(n-1)]. Any set *a* containing *n* elements has the index values

$[a_0, a_1, a_2, \dots a_{(n-1)}]$

These **iv's** may be operated on mathematically, in much the same way that **pitch class (pc)** values may be operated on, to achieve different permutations of the original set. The **index value identity (ivi)** of an element is the **iv** that an element retains from the original set, throughout the course of subsequent re-ordering operations.

Robert Morris discusses the same concept with different terminology in his ground-breaking work **Composition with Pitch Classes**, in which he refers to
operations with **iv's** as **Order Mapping (OM)**,¹¹¹ and lays the groundwork for undertaking and constructing the analysis which is to follow. For the purposes of this discussion, I have found that the term **Index Ordering (IO)** in place of **OM** conveys the nature of this concept with greater clarity. While the terms **IO** and **OM** are basically interchangeable, understanding and tracking the **ivi** of each element from Webern's rows is essential to understanding the set operations that he performs, which produce the harmonic structures that we find in Op. 27 III.

Brief Review of Terms:

- index value (iv)
- index value identity (ivi)
- Index Ordering (IO)

Let us examine one of Webern's twelve-tone rows to illustrate how **IO** may

be used to analyze Op. 27 III. Taking the first row from his Op. 27 tables,¹¹²

[3BA210647598]

let us show the iv for each element in the row set:

¹¹¹ Morris, Robert. **Composition with Pitch Classes: A Theory of Compositional Design.** Yale University Press: Binghamton, NY, 1987. pp. 115-122.

¹¹² Bailey, Katherine. "Webern's row tables." **Webern Studies.** Edited by Kathryn Bailey. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996. pp.199-205.

$[3_0B_1A_22_31_40_56_64_77_85_99_A8_B]$

This is the natural **IO** for any twelve-tone row. The **iv** of each element will be its **ivi** throughout any following operations. For instance, the **ivi** of **pc** 3 = 0, the **ivi** of **pc** B = 1, etc.

Now, let us assume that we would like to create **pc subsets** from this row based on **ivi's**. Let us use the following **iv subsets**:



This is equivalent to the following **IO** fragments:

 $[a_0 a_3 a_6 a_8 a_A a_B] \qquad [a_1 a_2 a_4 a_5 a_7 a_9]$

yielding the following **pc subsets:**

[3₀2₃6₆7₈9_A8_B] [B₁A₂1₄0₅4₇5₉] pc[326798] pc[BA1045] This technique appears to explain how Webern partitioned the contents of each row in Op. 27 III. The first row in Webern's Op. 27 tables incidentally also happens to be the first row used in movement III **[Fig. 35]**:

Figure 35



The next figure shows the first 5 measures of the movement [Fig. 36]:



And finally the following figure shows how the row is partitioned between the upper and lower voice [Fig. 37]:



The **iv subsets** show how the elements of the row are distributed between the two staves. The unique advantage of partitioning is that it effectively permits rearrangement of the row into nearly any desired **pc** subset permutation. In this case, Webern is targeting pairs of minor seconds- for harmonic, melodic, and contrapuntal purposes- that are not always adjacent within the original row construct. Furthermore, two combinatorial hexachords are produced which are not part of the original row construct. The following figure further clarifies this operation **[Fig. 38]**:

Figure 38

Deriving Index Subsets



The next figure shows a complete **iv subset** analysis of each row in Op. 27 III. Each row is shown along with the following information: 1) the row number as it appears in Webern's tables;¹¹³ 2) the measure space that the row occupies; 3) the mappings that occur, denoted by a box; and 4) the **iv subset/pc subset** values of each row fragment. The up-stemmed notes show the **pc's** which are found in the upper voice of the movement, while the down-stemmed notes show the **pc's** which are found in the lower voice. The notational properties of the analysis are similar to Forte's techniques for analytical segmentation¹¹⁴ [**Fig. 39**]:

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Forte, Allen. **A Major Webern Revision and Its Implications for Analysis.** *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 28, No. 1. (Winter, 1990). p. 229.

Figure 39

Op. 27, mvmt. III- row analysis





There are several features worth noting in this analysis. First, while Webern typically indexes the rows into hexachord pairs (many of which are combinatorial), there are also a number of rows that are indexed into heptachord/pentachord pairs in order to create greater harmonic density. Second, after the first three row iterations, Webern nearly always maps the end of each row onto the following row. Third, the verticalization of row segments permits for greater mapping complexity; the mappings from mm. 56 to the end are particularly worth examining. Whittall states of the first song of Op. 25, "Here, the conjunction of consistent linear order with a degree of vertical disorder could be an exemplary strategy for keeping the unity of musical space at arm's length,"¹¹⁵ and I believe the same can be said of Op. 27 III. By

¹¹⁵ Whittall, Arnold. **Webern and Multiple Meaning.** *Music Analysis*, Vol. 6, No. 3. (Oct., 1987). p. 338.

using complex row mappings in conjunction with **iv subset** partitioning, Webern achieves a multiplicity of internal row relationships that is quite astonishing in its complexity.

By partitioning each row into multiple segments in this manner using **iv subsets**, like pulling apart the teeth of two interlocking combs, Webern is essentially mapping the **ivi's** of the elements from the original row onto fragmented **IO's**, generating another row entirely. Another way of looking at it is to imagine that Webern is mapping the elements of one row onto the index of another row. The sequence of presentation of each **pc** is still governed by the underlying **P/I/R/RI** row permutations, but the **iv subsets** allow tremendous freedom in how each **pc** is distributed between the two staves/voices. Indexing permits much greater latitude in construction of harmony, melodic motive, and counterpoint than the literal ordering of the row permits. Harmony in particular is afforded drastically greater freedom due to circumvention of the built-in interval content of the row.

Christopher Hasty appears to support this type of contextual analysis with the following statements:

"I suggest that an examination of row forms abstracted from context offers us little insight into the form of Webern's music and obscures many of the analytic and aesthetic questions posed by this music. Webern's structural resources, both in plan and in execution, extend far beyond the ordering of pitch classes to encompass a variety of mutually conditioned musical domains."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Hasty, Christopher F. Composition and Context in Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern. *Music Analysis*, Vol. 7, No. 3. (Oct., 1988). p. 309.

These statements are given further weight by the fact that it was necessary to consult Webern's original row tables, as represented by Bailey, in order to make sense of his mapping and partitioning procedures. It is extremely doubtful that simply extrapolating the various permutations of the series into a matrix and analyzing the movement from that perspective would have permitted arrival at the conclusion that the harmonic structure of Op. 27 III is due to complex index partitioning.

Peter Westergaard supports this partitioning analysis of movement III,¹¹⁷ alluding to it briefly in the course of an in-depth study of Op. 27 II. Westergaard does not address the index subset theory in this particular discussion. However, in a follow-up paper dated three years later, Westergaard does address the issue of mapping the index ordering of one row onto the index ordering of another row while simultaneously partitioning, in the context of studying one of his own works.¹¹⁸

By way of comparison and contrast, it is also informative to study each aggregate as a verticalized harmonic collection in this movement as well [Fig. 40]:

¹¹⁷ Westergaard, Peter. Webern and "Total Organization": An Analysis of the Second Movement of Piano Variations, Op. 27. *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 1, No. 2. (Spring, 1963), pp. 107-120.

¹¹⁸ Westergaard, Peter. **Toward a Twelve-Tone Polyphony.** *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 4, No. 2. (Spring - Summer, 1966). p. 99.

Figure 40



Evidence of a choral structure is less obvious here than in movements I and II in terms of contrary motion in the outer voices, but there are still enough consistencies in voice-leading between sonorities to show that, once again, Webern was at least aware of the underlying choral implications of each harmonic collection. The mappings between each aggregate in particular seem to suggest some kind of predetermined or intentional structure- there is a definite visible pattern in terms of registral distribution of the overlapping tones.

The 3/2 meter of Op. 27 III is somewhat difficult to follow on a first perusal, inducing an occasional attempt at interpretive analysis of the supposed "actual" meter

implied by the rhythmic scheme. For example, James Rives Jones offers a metrical analysis of the first 14 bars of this movement¹¹⁹ which assumes that the given meter is a diversion from the "real" meter. Jones' analysis progresses by re-barring certain note-groups, to produce a complex metric scheme that fails to account for Webern's consistent and methodical rhythmic statements of hexachords in 12-beat phrases. Observe the metric clarity of the phrase lengths in the following diagram [**Fig. 41**]:



Jones' re-barring scheme is further refuted by Webern's own sketches as analyzed by Bailey, who writes, "All the sketches for this movement are in triple metre, but a decision on the exact specifications of this metre was surprisingly long in coming, as was the precise order of notes in the row."¹²⁰ It is evident that Webern gave a great deal of thought to the metric scheme for this movement, and did not arrive at it

¹¹⁹ Jones, James Rives. **Some Aspects of Rhythm and Meter in Webern's Opus 27.** *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 7, No. 1. (Autumn - Winter, 1968), pp. 103-109.

¹²⁰ Bailey, Kathryn. **Rhythm and Metre in Webern's Late Works.** *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 120, No. 2. (1995), pp. 256.

haphazardly. In my opinion, there is nothing to be gained from this sort of analytical obfuscation- the phrase lengths and their internal contrapuntal structures are perfectly clear from Webern's original meter.

VI. Webern's Later Life

a. Personal details

"All art, all music is based on laws."

--Webern, 14 December 1934¹²¹

December 3rd, 1933 marked Webern's 50th birthday. His close friends and colleagues honored him with a series of concerts and dedicated compositions in his honor. Unfortunately, this occasion was to coincide with the beginning of grave misfortunes for the composer. Bailey writes,

"As it happened, these joyful celebrations coincided with the beginning of the very rapid decline of Webern's fortunes... 1933 had not been a good year, and it was only the beginning. Immediately upon their coming to power in Germany the National Socialists had begun their programme for the 'purification' of the arts."¹²²

As a direct result of the following Jewish persecution by the Nazis, Schoenberg resigned from his post at the Berlin Academy on March 20th, 1933. By October, Schoenberg, his second wife, and their baby were in the United States. The

¹²¹ Bailey, Kathryn. The Life of Webern. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 148.
¹²² Ibid, p. 149.

loss of Schoenberg's close presence was the first of many tragedies that the coming time would lay at Webern's doorstep. Prior to Schoenberg's emigration, Webern had lost several close friends to death or suicide.¹²³ After the establishment of the Nazi party, many of his remaining friends also fled the country, including Ernst Krenek in 1937.

According to Bailey, Webern' conducting career effectively ended in 1934,¹²⁴ although it did not *officially* end until approximately two years later. Webern had one more major conducting engagement to perform a broadcast concert for *Ravag* (Radio Austria, the official government station) in 1935, an event which it turns out was probably the final blow to his conducting career in Austria. As to the nature of the impact this event had on Webern's career, Bailey extends no explanation. Moldenhauer, however, elucidates that Webern's inclusion of his own Bach transcription and Mendelssohn's violin concerto on the program caused Webern "to be relegated permanently to the status of *persona non grata*"¹²⁵ by the Nazi party.

Webern apparently never officially confirmed or denied later allegiance with the Nazi party. As Bailey states,

"Webern's political position has always remained somewhat vague; while there is sufficient documentary as well as anecdotal evidence to provide an unsettling picture

¹²³ Ibid, p. 150.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 151.

¹²⁵ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. **Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work.** Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. p. 447.

of a man who without question believed in Hitler's Third Reich- and for an amazingly long time- no one has ever provided incontrovertible evidence of his actually having been a member of the Nazi Party, as Schoenberg is alleged to have declared in a letter that no one has ever been able to reproduce.¹²⁶

In answer to a 1934 letter from Schoenberg, Webern emphatically declared that he had *not* joined the Nazis, and expressed a deep distaste for the anti-Semitism of his fellow Germans.¹²⁷ In a following letter dated June 20, 1937, Schoenberg expressed concern about rumors that Webern had joined the Nazis after all; it is unknown how Webern answered this inquiry, as no corresponding letter has ever been found.¹²⁸

At 1:15pm December 24th, 1935, Alban Berg passed away at the age of 50.¹²⁹ This was a tremendous mutual loss for Webern and Schoenberg. In 1936, Webern was asked to conduct the premiere of Berg's violin concerto in Barcelona. The engagement was disastrous- Webern was unable to pull all of the movements together due to endless obsessive rehearsing of only a few bars at a time, and another conductor, Hermann Scherchen, was obliged to premiere the piece instead. Webern's absolute last conducting engagement of his life was with the BBC Symphony on My 1st and 3rd 1936; the May 1 program featured the Berg Violin Concerto (which

¹²⁶ Bailey, Kathryn. The Life of Webern. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 166.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 152.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 154.

¹²⁹ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. p. 452.

Webern finally managed to conduct to his satisfaction), and two movements of the Berg *Lyric Suite*. The May 3 program featured the Bruckner Seventh Symphony.¹³⁰

On March 12, 1938, at 4:00pm, Hitler's troops invaded Austria, meeting with no resistance.¹³¹ Shortly after the invasion, Webern's music was included in an exhibition of 'degenerate art' in Vienna, and "both performance and publication of his music were banned."¹³² In order to replace his lost income, Webern applied to the Reichsmusikkammer (the Third Reich's Ministry of Music) for an artist's grant.¹³³ While Webern may have never *officially* become a Nazi, and despite the stigma of having his music decried, his enthusiasm for the Party is all too evident in his correspondence from this period.¹³⁴ Records of Webern's teaching activities continued until approximately 1944 (more-or-less until the end of his life), in a lecture series given annually at the homes of friends, and through private lessons.¹³⁵

On March 31, 1945, Webern and his family left Vienna due to increasing danger from Allied bombing raids. With train lines destroyed, and water, electricity and gas running short, the family "set out on foot to make their way to Mittersill, in

¹³⁰ Bailey, Kathryn. The Life of Webern. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 161.

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 164.

¹³² Ibid, p. 165.

¹³³ Ibid, p. 168.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 170.

¹³⁵ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. pp. 538-539.

the mountains in the Pinzgau, towards Salzburg^{"136}, there to await the prospect of safe return to Vienna.

b. Tragic Circumstances of Death

Webern died on the night of September 15, 1945, of gunshot wounds inflicted by an Allied soldier.¹³⁷ It was many years before anyone knew the exact details surrounding the incident. It required untold perseverance and countless inquiries on the part of Hans Moldenhauer to reconstruct the events of the tragedy, but Moldenhauer would not permit himself to be deterred from this task. As he stated to his wife Rosaleen during a pilgrimage to visit Webern's gravesite, "One should find out just how he died."¹³⁸

The drama of the investigation can be found in Moldenhauer's 1961 book **The Death of Anton Webern,** in which he chronicles the frustrating efforts to find documentation of the particulars of that fateful evening. The entire narrative of events laid out in correspondence, diary entries of Webern's family and related persons, and reconstructed from the official reports, is summarized in his 1970 article **Webern's Death,**¹³⁹ which eventually became a chapter in Moldenhauer's **Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work.**

¹³⁶ Bailey, Kathryn. The Life of Webern. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1998. p. 184.

¹³⁷ Moldenhauer, Hans. **The Death of Anton Webern: A Drama in Documents.** Philosophical Library, Inc.: New York, NY, 1961. p. 9.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Moldenhauer, Hans. Webern's Death. *The Musical Times*, Vol. 111, No. 1531. (Sep., 1970), pp. 877-881.

The short version of the story is as follows: According to an affidavit by former Military Intelligence officer Martin U. Heiman, two U.S. soldiers came to the temporary Webern residence in Mittersill on the night of Sept. 15, 1945, looking to arrest Benno Mattel, Webern's son-in-law, on charges of black marketeering. In the process of the arrest attempt, one of the soldiers accidentally bumped into Webern in a darkened hallway as Webern was going outside to smoke a cigar. The soldier, an excitable man with little combat experience, fired three shots in what he felt was selfdefense. Webern managed to stagger back into the house and into the arms of his wife Wilhelmine and daughter Christl. Wilhelmine later wrote,

"Together with my daughter, I laid him down on a mattress and started opening his clothes. My husband could still say the words 'It's over' ('Es ist aus'), and he started losing consciousness."¹⁴⁰

A short time later, Webern was taken away by Army medics, and Benno and Christl were arrested. Webern's body was found the next morning by daughter Amalie, on the floor of a nearby chapel which was being used as a morgue. Webern was 61 years old when he died, just a few months shy of his 62nd birthday.

The American soldier who fatally shot Anton Webern was an Army cook by the name of Raymond Bell. Of Bell, Moldenhauer writes,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 879.

"This final link in the chain of events deepens the sadness of the dramatic plot that had unfolded with the inevitability of a Greek tragedy. A decade later, almost to the day, the man who had killed Webern himself fell victim to the guilt from which he had suffered since that moment of panic. Raymond Bell died on September 3, 1955, from alcoholism. His wife, Helen, a school teacher in Mount Olive, North Carolina, wrote afterwards: 'I know very little about the accident. When he came home from the war, he told me he killed a man in line of duty. I know he worried greatly over it. Every time he became intoxicated, he would say 'I wish I hadn't killed that man'. I truly think it helped to bring on his sickness. He was a very kind man who loved everyone. These are the results of war. So many suffer.' "¹⁴¹

One has to feel a great deal of pity for Raymond Bell. There was no way he could have known what a cataclysm his actions would precipitate.

c. Unfinished Works and Movements: Opus 32

Webern was still an active and vital composer up to the very last days before his untimely death. Among his unfinished works, the last composition he was working on is of particular interest: a projected vocal work, potentially a cantata or an oratorio. Larry Todd writes,

"At the time of his tragic death on September 15, 1945, Anton Webern was engaged with what would have been his Opus 32, a chamber cantata on the poem "Das Sonnenlicht" by Hildegard Jone.... Webern's sketchbook, preserved today in the

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 881.

Hans Moldenhauer Archive in Spokane, Washington, contains seven manuscripts devoted to this final creative endeavor.¹⁴²

The outlines and preliminary melodic drafts of this work can be found in Webern's published sketch facsimiles.¹⁴³ The projected row for this work is of particular interest, as it is an especially unusual derived series. Writes Moldenhauer,

"In his commentary to *Sketches*, [Ernst] Krenek remarked on the symmetrical nature of this row, stating that it 'reaches out toward the boundaries of dodecaphonic possibilities...we have a tone-row that consists simply of four segments of the chromatic scale. Webern had ventured towards this point of no return before, and here near the unforeseeable end of his career, he again approached the extreme limit."¹⁴⁴

The row itself is shown in the following figure [Fig. 42]:



¹⁴² Todd, Larry R. **The Genesis of Webern's Opus 32.** *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 4. (Oct., 1980). p. 581.

¹⁴³ Webern, Anton von. Sketches (1926-1945). Carl Fischer Inc.: New York, 1968.

¹⁴⁴ Moldenhauer, Hans and Rosaleen. Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY, 1979. p. 622.

One can only begin to imagine the heights of genius that this work might have risen to, if Webern had gotten the opportunity to finish it. The unusual content of the row alone gives rise to fervent speculation as to what Webern might have had planned for the harmonic structure of the music.

VII. Conclusion

Anton Webern, along with his mentor Arnold Schoenberg and compatriot Alban Berg, remains today a towering figure of the serial revolution, and a champion of the *avant garde*. The influence of his musical techniques has become an integral part of the infrastructure of Western musical society. The face of classical music for the 20th century and beyond was permanently and immeasurably altered by Webern's vision of a music guided not only by intuition and emotion, but by mathematical precision and natural law, by symmetry and order.

In its depths of hidden meaning and complexity, Webern's music has become a metaphor for modern life. So much of Webern's music speaks to a titanic battle between intellect and intuition, between the cerebral and the emotional. The emerging artworks become compressed between the two, until- tempered by the pressure of internal conflict- a synthesis is distilled, which is not purely Modernism, but Modernism with sublimated vestiges of Romanticism and the Renaissance still infused within its formal architecture. Writes Whittall,

"Webern's approach to twelve-note harmony can be seen as a response, whether instinctive or intentional, to Schoenberg's ideas about multiple meaning in tonal composition. Yet even if there is a reasonably precise analogy between suspended and confirmed tonality on the one hand, and 'uncontrolled' and referential twelve-note harmony on the other, it is clear that Webern was far from convinced that emphasis on either the confirmed or the referential was necessary for coherent structure to be achieved."¹⁴⁵

Despite the composer's great depth of ground-breaking and revolutionary techniques, Webern still relied on his ear according to at least one observer, and composed from an instinctive place. Of his personal observations of Webern during the course of private studies with the composer, Humphrey Searle writes,

"Webern invariably uses the piano when composing, and his sketch-books are full of variants which would all be equally possible according to the twelve-tone technique; I suspect that he chooses the one of these which *sounds best* in the context, and therefore relies ultimately to some extent on his ear, which is, of course, astonishingly keen."¹⁴⁶

From this anecdote, it is tempting to merely say that Webern set aside technique when it suited him, thus closing the chapter and concluding the study. But this sort of cavalier statement would be a grave injustice to Webern's mature compositional efforts, his carefully designed serial techniques, his in-depth, disciplined explorations of partition-based harmony and his lifelong quest to transcend tonality. Webern's instinctive compulsion may have actually been his downfall in a certain regard, as he

 ¹⁴⁵ Whittall, Arnold. Webern and Multiple Meaning. *Music Analysis*, Vol. 6, No. 3. (Oct., 1987). p. 352.

¹⁴⁶ Searle, Humphrey and Anton von Webern. **Conversations with Webern.** *The Musical Times*, Vol. 81, No. 1172. (Oct., 1940). p. 405.

sought to compromise between research and tradition in his formal approach to composition.

Webern never managed to completely break free from Romanticism and the Renaissance in his music. We find within Webern's evolutionary phases as a composer overwhelming evidence of a mighty struggle to transcend his Romantic acculturation, which never quite achieved full fruition. We see in Op. 27 I the evidence of vestiges of tonal harmony, despite Webern's carefully thought-out and constructed serial counterpoint. We see the remnants of the Renaissance tradition in the symmetry of Webern's serial choral structures in Op. 27 II and III. We see the obvious Romanticism in the themes and harmonies of Op. 6, despite Webern's efforts to achieve compelling free atonality. We can trace this struggle all the way back to his earliest pieces such as the Piano Quintet, in which we see overwhelming evidence of Webern's paradoxical mission to escape tonality within the confines of tonality. And we can look to the future goal of Webern's music in his unfinished designs for Op. 32: complete chromatic freedom, guided by the transcendental disciplines of rigorous serialism, an ambition which he never fully realized.

Throughout Webern's canon, we can see the single-minded pursuit of an abstract musical goal never completely reached. So what is ultimately to be learned from this particular analysis of Webern's evolution as a composer? The primary lesson is this: while Webern managed to transcend tonality on a *local* level within his compositions, in the end, his immersion in the compositional architecture of the Romantic tradition, and the aesthetic considerations of the Renaissance choral

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tradition, prevented him from transcending tonality on a *formal* level. This is not a criticism, and I am not suggesting that the formal limitations of Webern's music are to be viewed as a flaw in any way. It is simply an attempt at an historical assessment of Webern's compositional success measured by his apparent theoretical goal. The fact remains that Webern achieved an earth-shattering degree of liberation from the tonal tradition, whether or not his formal limitations remained in place.

As one of my advisors so aptly pointed out to me: Of a truly monolithic genius such as Webern, who achieved so much in shattering the fetters of an unthinking tonal tradition, one could hardly expect more. Webern gifted the compositional world with the absolute transcendence of tonality on a microcosmic musical level, via the near-clairvoyant nature of his serial techniques. This would pave the way for others, such as Boulez, Babbitt, and Stockhausen, to eventually transcend tonality on a formal and global level as well. This is Anton Webern's greatest gift to music: the freedom through serial technique to speak the music that is necessary, emancipated from the constraints of the tonal past.

-David M. Shere

Santa Barbara, CA; July 31, 2007

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"Portraits from the Menagerie: Nightmare Creatures, part II" By David Matthew Shere

A miniature concerto for solo electric guitar and chamber orchestra (part II in a musical series on the theme of nightmares)

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PREFACE

For as long as I can remember, I have always had an extraordinarily vivid and lucid nightmare life. In the fall of 2002, while an undergraduate at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, WA, I became interested in writing a suite of musical sketches to portray some of the archetypal characters which I confront in my nightly wanderings. I sat down and compiled a list of creatures, chose five of them, and began sketching musical ideas to represent my thoughts about each creature. I completed the original "Portraits" in late November 2002, and premiered the piece at Cornish in mid-December 2002 with the Seattle Chamber Players. The piece was very well-received. In fall 2003, when I arrived at UC Santa Barbara to begin graduate studies, I submitted the piece to the Ensemble for Contemporary Music; it was chosen and performed again in early spring 2004, and it was once again well-received. I felt as though my musical treatment of the subject matter had struck a particular nerve, and I became interested in doing more sketches.

The original list I had compiled contained over 40 creatures. I decided that the appropriate thing to do would be to develop the list into a *series* of suites, each suite representing a new night of dreams. In fall of 2005 I chose six more characters, and began sketching ideas for the next suite in the series. I completed this second suite in late August of 2006, and here it is.

The first nightmare suite was written for Pierrot ensemble; the second nightmare suite is a miniature concerto written for electric guitar, and a small chamber orchestra based around the original Pierrot ensemble. The music of the second suite is definitively more complex in both harmonic language and orchestration than the first suite, and represents a distinct forward leap in my evolution as a composer. I owe Dr. Jeremy Haladyna a great debt of thanks for this evolution; his valuable insights in private lessons have helped me to overcome frustrating limitations in my compositional vocabulary, which had previously obstructed me from the full range of expression necessary to the soundscapes I wanted to portray.

-David M. Shere Santa Barbara, CA; October 2006

PERFORMANCE NOTES

INSTRUMENTATION:

- 2 C flutes
- Bb Clarinet
- Horn in F
- Electric guitar (soloist)
- Percussion (cymbal, 1 large gong, bass drum, 1 wood block, crotales, glockenspiel, marimba)
- Violin
- Viola
- Violoncello
- Piano

-Movement VI requires that the string players and the horn player have wooden sticks or pencils handy for *col legno* and percussive purposes.

-The overall tonal and timbral approach of each player to the piece should have a soft, blurry, hypnotic quality. At no time should the performance of any instrument sound harsh or piercing. Even at the loudest dynamic points, there should always be a warm, *Impressionistic* quality to the sound colors, evocative of a drowsy, dreamy state.










































































































































































































































































