

'Nur kein Schade!'

Schoenberg's Satirical Evaluation of 'Atonality' as a Guide for Interpreting Traditional Elements in Webern's *Symphonie*, Op. 21¹

In the first of his Op. 28 *Satires*, Arnold Schoenberg employed a twelve-tone row setting the word 'tonal' with a C-major triad and 'atonal' with the B-rooted *triade manca*. The canon ends with a new partitioning of the row to set the unexpected text '*Nur kein Schade!*', in which three four-note groups of the same prime form provide a completely new set of tertian sonorities, thereby suggesting that the difference between 'tonal' and 'atonal' is of no significance.

Stimulated by a close reading of the first *Satire*, this essay examines features of the theme and first variation from the second movement of Anton Webern's *Symphonie*, op. 21.

Schoenberg's *Satires*, his op. 28, were composed in response to the flood of negative criticism that surrounded his work in the mid-1920s. This trinity of sardonic vocal works answered the critics who had coined that 'hateful' word 'atonality',² the composers – especially Stravinsky, whom Schoenberg called *der kleine Modernsky*,³ and the academics, whom he chided for their reliance on Riemann's definitions.⁴

The first of these *Satires* is a musical analog for the now well-known footnote that Schoenberg had added in 1922 to his third edition of *Harmonielehre*:

'Even the word 'tonal' is incorrectly used if it is intended in an exclusive rather than inclusive sense. It can be valid only in the following sense: Everything implied by a series of tones constitutes tonality, whether it be brought together by means of direct reference to a single fundamental or by more complicated connections. From this single correct definition, no reasonable opposite corresponding to the word 'atonality' can be formed. (...) To call any

1 This paper was delivered at the 7th Congress of the Dutch Society for Music Theory, Tilburg, 25 February 2005.

2 The first *Satire*, *Am Scheideweg*. Alban Berg, 'What is Atonality?' in Nicolas Slonimsky, *Music Since 1900*, 3rd ed., trans. by M. D. Herter Norton (New York: Coleman-Ross Co., Inc., 1949), p. 671, explains the origins of the term:

'The word 'atonal' came to stand collectively for music of which it was assumed not only that it had no harmonic center, but was also devoid of all other musical attributes such as melos, rhythm, form in part and whole; so that today the designation as good as signifies a music that is not music, and is used to imply the exact opposite of what has heretofore been considered music.'

3 The second *Satire*, *Vielseitigkeit*, with its explicit references to Igor Stravinsky.

4 The third *Satire*, *Der neue Klassizismus*, in which the listener is directed to Hugo Riemann for definitions of 'romantic' and 'classic.'

relation of tones atonal is just as farfetched as it would be to designate a relation of colors aspectral or acomplementary. There is no such antithesis.⁵

In the first *Satire*, a confident C-E-G, the familiar icon of 'tonality,' is countered immediately with a timid B-D#-F, the old 'deficient triad' (*triade manca*) – seen commonly in 18th-century treatises as a basis for augmented-sixth harmony.⁶

To - nal o - der a - to - nal? Nun sagt ein - mal in wel - chem Stall in
 die - sem Fall die größ - re Zahl. daß man sich hal - ten, hal - ten kann am si - chern Wall.
 Nur kein Scha - de! Nur kein Scha - de! Nur kein Scha - de! Nur kein Scha - de!

Example 1

Schoenberg, *Drei Satiren No. 1*.

The canonic line sets the text with a series of tertian sonorities that would be familiar constructs in musical practice of the late-19th or early 20th centuries – the aforementioned triads (sufficient and deficient), reference tones A and D with their respective thirds, and chords with added tones, the whole comprising a not particularly unusual tonal motion from C to A to B to D (prolonged) to A and back to C. The harmonic setting accommodates a text that is given a further touch of satire by its musical scansion, one which contrasts the implied pentameter and disparate leaps of 'oder atonal' with the tetrameter of the remaining text set with the typical 'tonal' idiom of repeated pitches from weak to strong metrical accent in the nature of a series of anticipations. This shift

5 Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter, Berkeley 1978, p. 432. The German original, from the third edition of *Harmonielehre*, 1922, p. 486, reads:

'Es ist schon der Ausdruck: tonal unrichtig gebraucht, wenn man ihn im ausschließenden und nicht im einschließenden Sinn meint. Nur so kann es gelten: Alles was aus einer Tonreihe hervorgeht, sei es durch das Mittel der direkten Beziehung auf einen einzigen Grundton oder durch kompliziertere Bindungen zusammengefaßt, bildet die Tonalität. Daß sich von dieser einzig richtigen Definition kein vernünftiger, dem Wort Atonalität entsprechender Gegensatz bilden läßt, muß einleuchten. (...) Aber atonal wird man irgend ein Verhältnis von Tönen sowenig nennen können, als man ein Verhältnis von Farben als aspektral oder akomplementär bezeichnen. Diesen Gegensatz gibt es eben nicht.'

6 See Georg Andreas Sorge, *Vorgemach der musicalischen Composition*, Lobenstein 1745-1747.

from pentameter to tetrameter is defined by the rhyming syllable 'al', that ends each unit (indicated here by underscoring): 'Tonal oder atonal? Nun sagt einmal in welchem Stall in diesem Fall die größte Zahl, daß man sich halten, halten kann am sichern Wall.' Highlighted are the assonant properties of the text, while its inherent meaning takes a secondary role.⁷

This is the text cited in the frontispiece of the score for op. 28.⁸ However, Schoenberg adds the remark *Nur kein Schade!* as a postlude in the canon itself, and thereby reorganizes the pitches of his tone row into four-note groupings to coincide with the tetrameter of the added text, as shown on the third line of Example 1. This change introduces some anomalies, so that the final two settings could be subject to multiple harmonic interpretations.

When the four voices of this canon are combined, the C-major triad dominates throughout until the postlude, where the four musical settings of '*Nur kein Schade!*' sound simultaneously, masking each other's identity, the prominent C-major sound disappearing into the foursome of ambiguities. With the added text of this little postlude, Schoenberg says with his music, 'No harm done; it really doesn't matter!' For Schoenberg, the meaning of this satire is not to be taken from its overwhelming emphasis on the sound of the C-major triad, nor from the repeated 'al' sound; rather, the acerbic wit of the composer is demonstrated as one set of traditional melodic and harmonic features assigned to the principal text is replaced by a new musical logic in the postlude using the same series of tones. From a structural point of view, the work may, of course, be described as a *canon a 4* based upon a single tone row and its retrograde.

While this work may represent the height of Schoenberg's sarcasm in response to his detractors, his views about the new music and its designation as 'atonal' remained quite consistent from the earliest days to his time in America. He never subscribed to the notion that this music negated musical language of the past – as one commonly finds in the general references as well as in the work of specialists. In the article on 'atonicity' in *The New Grove Dictionary*, as an example, the authors define it as a negation of 'tonality,' and, in turn, they define 'tonality' as a practice,

'in which pitches are contextually defined so that each particular definition of a given pitch yields a different tonal function. (...) Such a definition is further refined by larger musical contexts, and the roles of rhythm, register, dynamics and timbre.'⁹

Already in 1911, in the first edition of *Harmonielehre*, Schoenberg had provided this eloquent statement contrasting his own positive view with the view of negation that persists even to the present day – as exemplified in the New Grove article.

'It has never been the purpose and effect of new art to suppress the old, its predecessor, certainly not to destroy it. (...) The appearance of the new can far better be compared with the flowering of a tree: it is the natural growth of the tree of life. (...) Short memory and mea-

7 'Tonal or atonal? Now tell me in this instance in which category is the larger number that one can perceive' (translation by the author).

8 Schoenberg, *Drei Satiren für gemischten Chor* op. 28, Vienna 1926.

9 'Atonality,' in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, London 2001, accessed online, June 23, 2005.

ger insight suffice to confuse growth with overthrow; in order to believe that, when the new shoots emerge from what was formerly new, destruction of the old is at hand.¹⁰

Elsewhere in the 1911 text, at the place where he first introduced the concept of modal mixture, Schoenberg had said, 'Of course, all chords are related to each other in some way, as are all humans.'¹¹ In an essay written in 1937, while taking a more moderate view toward the term 'atonal,' Schoenberg still insisted 'that the new music was merely a logical development of musical resources.'¹²

Let us examine the flowering of the tree – i.e., the logical development of musical resources from the 18th- and 19th-century repertory within this so-called 'atonal' repertory.

The associations of chord roots with their thirds that we see in the first *Satire* were also a feature of Schoenberg's *Bläserquintett*, op. 26, that had been written only one and one-half years before, i.e., 1923-1924. As shown in Example 2, residual features of past 'tonal' practice are readily apparent in the opening of the first movement, where the horn's initiating B \flat is answered by the flute's six-note melody beginning with the descending minor sixth E \flat to G and then proceeding upward by step. The oboe responds with an upward fifth transposition of this six-note melody, having only its final pitch adjusted. Together these two thematic entries comprise the prime form of Schoenberg's tone row for the work. References to earlier practice are unmistakable in this opening statement. One might think of the typical subject/answer discourse of an 18th- or 19th-century fugue.

Example 2

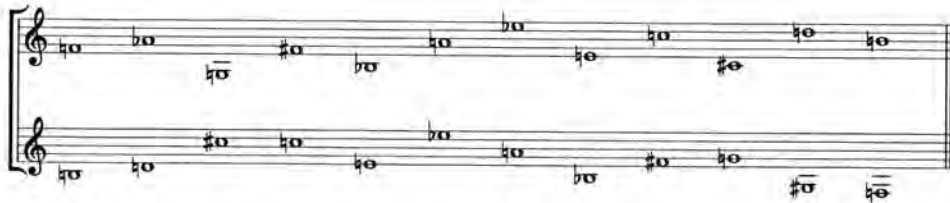
Schoenberg, *Bläserquintett* op. 26.

The *Bläserquintett* was accepted for performance by the International Society for Contemporary Music at their 1926 meeting in Zurich. Schoenberg asked his younger colleague and former student Anton Webern to conduct this performance, an experience

- 10 Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, p. 401. The original German text, *Harmonielehre*, p. 479, reads: 'Nie war es Absicht und Wirkung neuer Kunst, die alte, ihre Vorgängerin, zu verdrängen oder gar zu zerstören. (...) Man kann das Auftreten des Neuen weit besser mit dem Blühen eines Baumes vergleichen: es ist natürliches Werden des Lebensbaumes. (...) Mangelndes Gedächtnis und geringe Einsicht genügen, um Werden mit Umsturz zu verwechseln; um zu glauben, wenn Neues aus dem Ehemals-Neuen sprießt, sei dies die Zerstörung des Alten.'
- 11 Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, p. 228. Roy E. Carter translates the passage: 'In one way or another all chords are naturally related to one another, as are all men.' The original German text, *Harmonielehre*, p. 275, reads: 'Irgendwie sind natürlich alle Akkorde miteinander verwandt, so wie alle Menschen.'
- 12 Schoenberg, 'How One Becomes Lonely,' in: *Style and Idea*, New York 1975, p. 50.

that provided Webern an intimate acquaintance with the musical language in Schoenberg's quintet.¹³

Thus, it is not surprising to find Webern's next work, his Op. 21 *Symphonie*, with a similar feature – a tone row beginning with a referential pitch, F, and its third, in this case the minor third, A \flat , as shown in Example 3. Webern began work in November–December 1927 on what was to become the second movement of the *Symphonie* – a theme and variations.



Example 3

Twelve tone row of Webern, *Symphonie* op. 21, 2nd mvt., prime form and retrograde.

Scholarly work on the second movement of op. 21 is almost exclusively concerned with its features of symmetry. In her extended study of the twelve-note music of Anton Webern, Kathryn Bailey posits,

'There is nothing about the material presented in the first eleven bars that remains constant throughout the ensuing eight sections, except for the idea of horizontal symmetry. The variations in this movement provide successive interpretations of an idea that is not intrinsically musical.'¹⁴

Her further discussion is limited to features of symmetry.

As shown in the example, the theme comprises a melodic statement of the prime form of the row in the clarinet, accompanied by its retrograde in harp and two horns. As is well known, this particular row is palindromic in that its retrograde is a tritone transposition of its prime form. Thus, each row may be given two designations; P-0 is equivalent to R1-6. As a result of this opposite symmetry, a note-by-note combination of the melodic P-0 with an accompanimental R-0 would produce a series of tritones as shown in the example. But Webern does not present his theme in a note-against-note setting. Rather, the accompaniment moves from one ordinal to the next with a different pacing and grouping than does the melody. As a result, the initial F-to-B tritone of melodic clarinet and accompanimental harp is followed by a combination of ordinal 2 A \flat from P-0 in the clarinet with the vertical dyad of ordinals 2 and 3 from R-0 (D-C \sharp) in the horns as shown in Example 4. With the third ordinal of the accompaniment, C \sharp , sounding above the clarinet's second ordinal, A \flat , the perfect fourth is privileged.

Illustrative of the emphasis on constructive serial features in the secondary literature is John Rahn's remark that the horn often plays too loudly, so that the series of successive tritones is obscured.¹⁵ It is difficult to imagine that this high C \sharp is not intended to

13 Hans and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work*, London, 1978, pp. 292-3.

14 Kathryn Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern*, Cambridge 1991, p. 200.

15 John Rahn, *Basic Atonal Theory*, New York 1980, p. 4.



Example 4

Pacing and grouping of row notes in the theme.



Example 5

sound with the $A\flat$ of the clarinet, and thus to produce an audible perfect fourth in contrast to the initial vertical tritone. The technique of bracketing the clarinet with the two horns, as shown in Example 5, is, of course, common to 18th and 19-century orchestral practice.

The tension produced by this tonal conflict of tritone followed by perfect fourth finds its parallel in Schoenberg's often cited discussion of 'idea' from the essay 'New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea':

'Every tone which is added to a beginning tone makes the meaning of that tone doubtful. If, for instance, G follows after C, the ear may not be sure whether this expresses C major or G major, or even F major or E minor; and the addition of other tones may or may not clarify this problem. In this manner there is produced a state of unrest, of imbalance which grows throughout most of the piece, and is enforced further by similar functions of the rhythm. The method by which balance is restored seems to me the real idea of the composition.'¹⁶

Applying Schoenberg's statement in Webern's second movement of the *Symphonie*, we may interpret the succession of audible tritone to audible perfect fourth as the presentation of its tonal problem. This conflict is the 'intrinsically musical' feature of the theme, that plays out over the entire movement. While an investigation as to how this problem is reconciled is beyond the scope of this essay, it will be instructive to examine the first variation in respect to the conflict of tritone versus perfect fourth.

This variation illustrates one of the characteristics of early twentieth-century artistic expression: its tendency to cross the human threshold for perception. Thus, as examples from the graphic arts, the physical object is obscured in the cubism of Picasso, the expressionism of Kandinsky, the masks of Jawlensky; tone clusters obscure individual pitches in music as in the final sonority of Edgar Varese's *Octandre*, where horn, trom-

16 Schoenberg, 'New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea,' in: *Style and Idea*, p. 123.

bone and trumpet participate in a semitone cluster at a high range, so that the rich overtones of the trombone mask the other pitches in such a way that no single pitch can be discerned.¹⁷

In the first variation of the second movement in his Op. 21 *Symphonie*, Webern provides another type of masking. It is the result of two simultaneous canons. From a structural point of view, this variation expands symmetrical features from the 'theme.' Whereas the 'theme' made use only of the 0-family of row forms – specifically P-0 and R-0 –, the first variation makes use of row forms from the semitone-related families – P-1, R-1 and I-11, RI-11. Variation 2, by the way, continues this outward symmetrical motion by using row forms from the whole tone related families – P-2 and I-10.¹⁸ This symmetry, intriguing as it may be, represents the 'intrinsically non-musical' aspect to which Bailey refers.¹⁹ More important, however, and as yet unremarked in over a half century of scholarly discourse, are the 'tonal' relations that are set into motion through this symmetry.

Variation one is a double canon in contrary motion. The canonic pairings are established by means of corresponding gestures and rhythms. On that basis, the first canon couples first violin (R-1 to P-1) with cello (RI-11 to I-11) – i.e., a canon in contrary motion issuing from a major 23rd (three octaves plus a major 2nd); the second canon couples second violin (P-1 to R-1) with viola (I-11 to RI-11) – i.e., a canon in contrary motion issuing from a major 16th (two octaves plus a major 2nd).

These relationships are only a product of the serial apparatus. What each of the two canonic pairings sets forth, is a series of vertical perfect-fourth pairings and a horizontal motion to the tritone and back, so that the 'musical' problem presented in the first gesture of the theme is now given a new interpretation.

At this point it is important to differentiate between the constructive serial features of symmetry and the musical features produced from the particular dispositions of these symmetries. In this regard, note that the first dyad of the first violin *dux*, with C and its minor third E \flat below, is imitated at the perfect fourth by the first dyad of the cello *comes*, with G and its minor third B \flat below. Here the application of our musical training comes into play. In the case of ascending arpeggiation of thirds, we perceive the first and lowest tone as fundamental or root. In the opposite case of descending arpeggiation of thirds, however, the harmonic meaning will be reassessed as new tones are added. That is to say, we have all been trained to evaluate the harmonic meaning from the bass tone upward, regardless of the linear order of presentation. Of course, we also recognize from the bass upward that the upper note of a sixth acts as fundamental or root.

As the top line in Example 6, the line of this first violin *dux* may be seen to outline a series of tertian sonorities that connect the initial C to the tritone-related F \sharp , as follows: first, C with its minor third; second, D with its major seventh (and an added minor third); third, the tritone-related E-B \flat , in effect bracketed by the composer as pizzicato notes; fourth, the split third and fifth of an E-rooted harmony; and fifth, F \sharp and its minor third.

17 The pitches in question are: trombone b 1 , trumpet c 3 , and horn c $^{\sharp 2}$.

18 In Webern's row charts, rows numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4 corresponded to the numbers of current usage, P-0, R-0, I-0 and RI-0, respectively. The subsequent numbers were grouped in 'families' of four and arranged in symmetrical fashion around the 0-family. Accordingly, Webern's numbers for P-1, R-1, I-11 and RI-11 of variation 1 were 5, 6, 11 and 12, respectively. Those for P-2, R-2 and I-10, RI-10 of variation 2 were 17, 18, 23 and 24, respectively. The charts are found in the Anton Webern Archive of the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel, Switzerland.

19 See note 14, above.

Example 6

Webern, *Symphonie* op. 21, 2nd mvt., Variation 1, 1st violin-cello canon.

The parallel between the outer dyads, C/E \flat and F \sharp /A, is clear as a pair of roots with their respective minor thirds. Whereas the internal sonorities are by themselves ambiguous, the interpretation given here permits one to experience a stepwise harmonic connection from C to D to E to F \sharp . The cello *comes* imitates first, C/E \flat at the perfect fourth with G/B \flat ; second, D/C \sharp at the perfect fourth with A/G \sharp , with both lines adding f-natural; third, the two bracketed pizzicato notes; fourth, B/G/G \sharp (split third and fifth, implying an E-rooted harmony) with D/D \sharp /B (split third and root of B harmony); and fifth, F \sharp /A with C \sharp /E. This vertical pairing of perfect-fourth related sonorities, as presented in neutral rhythm, articulation and dynamics in Example 6, may be compared with its appearance with the rhythmic, dynamic and articulatory markings as given by the composer in Example 7.

Example 7

Canon of Example 6, with Webern's rhythm, articulation and dynamics.

As stated, the second canon is between second violin and viola; it is a retrograde of the first canon and preserves all of the same vertical alignments. Its vertical pairing is shown in neutral rhythm in Example 8 and then in the form that it appears in score in Example 9.

As a last step, we now put the two canons together in Example 10. The masking of these simple vertical alignments is complete. The relationships are clearly present, but not easily discerned – certainly not in a single audition of the work.

I conclude with a few observations about Webern's music and its adherence to Schoenberg's musical concepts.

Example 8

Webern, *Symphonie* op. 21, 2nd mvt., Variation 1, 2nd violin-violon canon.

Example 9

Canon of Example 8, with Webern's rhythm, articulation and dynamics.

The harmonic descriptions presented in this essay emanate from typical tertian formations found in the late-nineteenth century, especially in such works as Hugo Wolf's *Lebewohl*, Richard Strauss's *O wärst du mein* and *Ruhe meine Seele*, Wagner's *Parsifal*, and Schoenberg's op. 2 *Lieder* – a repertory that makes considerable use of reinterpreted harmonic roots, i.e., *Zweideutigkeit*.²⁰ To this may be added tertian combinations not common to nineteenth-century repertory, involving triads with split major/minor thirds sounding simultaneously, commonly found in the works of Bartók and Hindemith;²¹ and sonorities introducing new combinations of the qualities of thirds and sevenths. Prominent among this latter type is the minor triad with the major seventh, that is found, among other places, in Schoenberg's *Book of Hanging Gardens* and Hindemith's *Kleine Kammermusik*.²²

20 For a discussion of reinterpreted harmonic roots in late-nineteenth-century contexts, see Graham H. Phipps, 'The Tritone as an Equivalency: A Contextual Perspective for Approaching Schoenberg's Music,' in: *The Journal of Musicology* 4 (Winter 1985-86) 1, pp. 51-69.

21 Béla Bartók, *Second String Quartet*, first movement, mm. 38-41 (A harmony with simultaneous C and C#), and Paul Hindemith, *Symphonie Mathis der Maler*, first movement, m. 221 (D major arpeggiated in second violin, sounding against vertical D minor in 'cello and contrabass').

22 Arnold Schoenberg, *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*, Vienna 1914, the first chord in Lied number 2 (*Hain in diesen Paradiesen*) and Paul Hindemith, *Kleine Kammermusik*, op. 24 no. 2, Frankfurt a. M. 1922, fourth movement.

The image displays a musical score for a four-part double canon, spanning measures 11 to 23. The score is written for four staves, likely representing different instruments. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The music is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Articulation markings such as 'pizz.' (pizzicato) and 'arco' (arco) are used throughout. Dynamics include 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'f' (forte). The score is divided into two systems, with measures 11-17 in the first system and measures 18-23 in the second system.

Example 10

Webern, *Symphonie* op. 21, 2nd mvt., Variation 1, complete four part double canon.

A particular feature of Webern's serial music is that the disjunct leaps often found between adjacent melodic pitches outline the kinds of tertian harmonies described above. These groups of pitches that form the harmonies are set apart by means of timbral change, rhythmic motives, changes in articulation, and dynamics. Furthermore, the motion from one of these harmonies to the next follows a plan that is consistent with the musical logic of the past – oftentimes with motions by fifth. Lack of attention to these groupings can easily lead to a perception that Webern's musical language is pointillistic, as has often been asserted by critics.²³

Webern's obvious fascination with numerical relationships has often led to analytical discourse that dissociates his music from past practice. As seen in the first variation from Op. 21, the serial structures form a nexus of symmetries around the original row. When one explores the manifestations of these symmetries, however, the real musical features reveal themselves to us.

²³ These phenomena are discussed in Graham H. Phipps, 'Harmony as a Determinant of Structure in Webern's Variations for Orchestra,' in: *Music Theory and Exploration of the Past*, ed. by Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein, Chicago 1993, pp. 473-504.