

A Great Composer Comes Back to Jewry

The Case of Arnold Schoenberg

By

Viator

GERMANY has again dropped a great man. Arnold Schoenberg, one of the biggest living composers, has been given leave of absence, because he is a non-Aryan, from the Berlin Academy of Music, where he was since 1925 in charge of the Master class, and he has made his permanent home in Paris.

Schoenberg was born in Vienna on September 13th, 1874. His great choral work, the "Gurre Lieder," was written in 1889, when he was still entirely under the influence of the romantics, especially Wagner. Afterwards he developed into an independent, sovereign master of atonal, or as it might be better termed, polytonal style. In his "Teaching of Harmony" (1911), the only compendium of modern music that is important for our epoch, as well as in a previous work on Bach, Schoenberg lays it down that the traditional predominance of the usual eight-tone scale has no exclusive right to existence, that the twelve tones of the chromatic tone-scale have equal value, and that it is possible to derive from it a composition which is much richer than that of the advanced impressionists.

Of course this thesis, which runs counter to the accepted sense of sound, has roused a tremendous amount of resistance. The eminent qualities of Schoenberg which stand revealed in everything he writes, have nevertheless convinced many of his opponents, and have lifted him to the great place that he holds in the musical life of our day. The Santa Cecilia Academy of Music at Rome has made him an honorary member. Of his most important pupils Anton von Weber

and Alban Berg, the first has distinguished himself in chamber music, and the other by his opera "Wozzek," one of the greatest stage successes of the last ten years, which has been performed an immense number of times in Germany, and is to be performed this winter in Moscow.

SCHOENBERG'S works include : Symphonic works : "The Clouded Night," orchestral, based on Maeterlink's symphonic poem "Pelleas and Nelisande"; Orchestral pieces : "The Serenade," and variations for Orchestra; and in his later period, the orchestral remodelling of Bach's Organ Prelude and Organ Fugue in Es Dur.

Chamber Music : Streich Quartette, with text by Stefan George. Piano Music : Six Short Pieces for Piano, which Busoni has illustrated with his finger exercises, and "dedicated with awe and admiration to the composer." Choral and singing works : The Nordic "Heroic Peace," the "Gurre Lieder" already mentioned, and the Mixed Choir.

It is significant that during the Great War Schoenberg composed a "Peace Chorus." There are also the "Pierrot Lunaire," inspired by "Baudelaire's poem, the oratory, "Jacob's Ladder," and "Six Songs for Orchestra." Operas : The one-act "The Lucky Hand" : "From To-day Till Tomorrow" : and "Anticipation." The third of these, is a monodrama, performed entirely by one woman singer. There is also a Biblical drama, still unpublished, and his opera "Moses and Aaron," which was completed in 1930.

Schoenberg's attitude on the Jewish question is of some interest. He abandoned Judaism about twenty years ago, thus achieving, as he points out, an extension of his citizenship rights. Yet the subjects which he has selected for his works show that he continued to maintain a profound inner relationship with Judaism; and now that it has become a question of defending the vital interests of German Jewry, he has taken up an avowedly Jewish stand.

Schoenberg contends that Judaism must hark back to its original Eastern cultural elements, and he ardently welcomes the efforts that are being made to create a distinctive Jewish culture in Palestine.

When I asked him about his musical plans for the future, Schoenberg replied without hesitation, that at this moment, everything else must be put in the background, must yield place to what is the most important matter to him now—the organisation of a great relief work in America, in the interests of the German Jews, whose lives are menaced by the Hitler regime.

Schoenberg, the giant of modern music, with his immense constructive abilities based on mathematics, and rising through painting to music, is a man who has given his mind to the tiniest details of his work, and whatever he takes up, he is a man who will carry out his plans to the end.

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laid down as the proper medium between man and man. This has helped the Jew to remain the simple home-loving man he still is to-day. And many who have cursed him and scourged his body and tried to kill his soul, have in the end been forced to acknowledge, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! And thy Tabernacles, O Israel!"

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