

MUSIC IN POST-EMPIRE AUSTRIA

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TO present a brief picture of the new music in Austria today is not so easy. I attempted the task in 1922 in a small book, now inaccurate and out-of-date, and in 1927 in a longer contribution to an anthology describing the new Austrian state's first decade. The 1927 account is no longer entirely pertinent, so I will undertake a third attempt. But to make the present situation comprehensible to a foreign audience, I must turn for a moment to the past.

Music in Austria—at least since the war—is Viennese, for all musical talent gravitates towards Vienna and musical culture is nourished elsewhere only in such places as Salzburg, Graz, Innsbruck and Linz. The country at large does have great musicality. But it lacks the Italian and so-called Slavic elements which had put their decisive stamp on the music of the old Austria, the great pre-war empire of many racial groups. On the other hand Vienna is gradually becoming an autochthonous music capital, in close relation with other important art centers such as Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, Milan and New York.

Still potent is the tradition of the old Vienna, the amazing, lively capital whose public had an unusual love and understanding of music and offered the most attractive environment even to great foreign masters (Beethoven, Brahms). Vienna still attracts notable outsiders, Richard Strauss, for example, but it is gradually petrifying into a citadel of traditionalism. It has fallen into the dangerous practice of acknowledging great talent too late for the artist, and also too late for the city. It is the fault of the teachers, authorities, and critics of the press that really talented young men have been driven into foreign countries. The musical atmosphere of Vienna cannot be grasped

unless one realizes the power of the sixty-year-old conservatives (and of those who are born sixty and conservative), and understands the opposition, which has always had to fight against oppression. Again and again a genius just emerging from the battle gains the name of a Classic; then the next man to appear is discredited. This happened to Bruckner, to Hugo Wolf and to Mahler, whom the Viennese now consider classics. Schönberg, about whom there is still a little doubt, will probably soon join their ranks. It is his disciples who now bear the brunt of the struggle.

I do not propose to enumerate all contemporary Austrian composers but merely the leaders, and will indicate their tendencies. I will also point out the elements which are common to the new music of other countries.



The symbolic hero of the new Austrian music (and this is but little understood by the outside world) is Gustav Mahler. As an artist with a high sense of duty to his craft, as an innovating conductor and director, as a composer who perceived the realm of the emotions and discerned the technic of a new age (even where he seemed to disavow it), in all these various ways Mahler is the hero and the leader of the entire new generation in Austria. Arnold Schönberg stems directly from him.

Schönberg throws into relief the persistence of the Viennese tradition, and aptly exemplifies the furious battle of an independent, upright artist against it. At the time Schönberg first appeared, the traditional forces were Brahms and the Tristan-worship (*Tristan* was not performed in Vienna until 1883, after Wagner's death). Schönberg began at once to reach beyond this Tristan-world: thus we gained the *String Quartet* and the *Gurre-Lieder*. Then he fell under the influences of Mahler, of Debussy, of the painter and poet Oskar Kokoschka, and of all the presentiments of a pre-war spiritual state. He shattered the old harmonic mold and fled to impressionism, to musical aphorisms. It was not until after the war that he discovered his real form, and built his own structure. The progression from

Pierrot Lunaire, which began this new period, to the works in the twelve-tone system, perhaps to the *Serenade*, and then to the third *String Quartet*, is along a path which is wide and pregnant with meaning. His present position rests upon a structural music of the sternest type, as is revealed by his new opera, *Von Heute auf Morgen*.

He is alone, surrounded by comparatively few followers, and in direct antithesis to the neo-classic tendencies that characterize the new music elsewhere. These tendencies are represented in a way by Stravinsky, who moved from a national rhythmic to an international static development, and by Hindemith, who follows in the line of Bach—Brahms—Reger. To the neo-classicist, music is form realized by tone, a game to be played with the latest means at hand. Opposed to that concept is Schönberg, the romantic, acknowledging the soul, the desires and emotions, even when parodying them. Perhaps this is the Austrian in him.

At any rate his present pupils are pursuing this path. Not the least of these is his friend Alexander vom Zemlinsky, who studied with him for a short time. Zemlinsky is an excellent conductor (now Kapellmeister of the Berlin Staatsoper) and a composer of operas, songs and chamber-music that deserve a wider reputation than they have as yet gained. Others are: Anton von Webern, master of the short, originally impressionistic form; Alban Berg, famous for his opera *Wozzeck*, in which the form of *Pierrot Lunaire* was for the first time transferred to the theatre, and by which the hitherto unknown intensity of a new music was revealed; Egon Wellesz, professor of the history of music at the University of Vienna, a man of great spiritual power, a friend of Hofmannsthal and Jacob Wassermann, both of whom have supplied him with librettos for operas. The operas and ballets of Wellesz are entirely uninfluenced by the great multitude. They take up once more the old formal tradition of music and break a path into the present that can be neither wide nor comfortable.

Still other followers of Schönberg are Karl Horwitz—who, unfortunately, died very young—a musician of exceptional purity and strength of form, coupled with the richest lyrical inven-

tion, and finally Paul Amadeus Pisk, critic and educator of the musical public and a composer of independence and taste.



Not actually pupils of Schönberg, but friends of his school are Josef Mathias Hauer and Rudolf Réti. Hauer startled the musical world of Vienna by anarchic musical theories, set forth in many articles. He declared war on all accompanied music, and favored retaining only single voices, as in the Gregorian chant. He believed that only tempered instruments, the piano, organ or harmonium should be considered musically; strings and wind instruments he proscribed as impure. These theories, a noteworthy demonstration of which were his songs on texts by Hölderlin, have been abandoned. In their place, however, he has formulated a twelve-tone system that operates upon the same hypothesis as Schönberg's, although each of these has been independently arrived at. But Hauer still depends entirely on consonance, whereas Schönberg has destroyed the old ideas of harmony. It is for this reason that Hauer's work has not the true revolutionary ring; quite the contrary. Since he has decided to write again for the various voice registers and to use other instruments than the tempered ones, he has had one success after another with orchestral compositions, chamber-music and choral works.

Rudolf Réti, a fanatic about melody and execution, won fame as the chief organizer of that Salzburg Festival of 1922 from which the International Society for Contemporary Music developed.

Still to be counted among the new Austrian musicians is Franz Schreker, although he was not born in Austria and has been living in Berlin for the past ten years directing the University of Music of the Prussian State. Schreker is known throughout Germany as a composer of operas. The music-dramas, for which he writes his own texts, have long been recognized as a continuation of the work of Richard Wagner. They are inspired by an undeniably strong dramatic power and by a

high degree of musical skill. At first the instrumentation bore the imprint of French impressionism, but he has already divested himself of that color and is now striving for simplicity of line. Schreker is without any doubt an important personality.

Schreker's pupils include Ernst Krenek, Alois Haba, Felix Petyrek and Wilhelm Grosz. Krenek, the composer of *Jonny Spielt Auf* and numerous other works of every kind, has a supple spirit and a sparkling talent. He writes his librettos with remarkable skill, and is also a notable critic. Haba (born in Czechoslovakia and now a professor in Prague) after several promising starts, has continued to compose nothing but quarter-tone music. Petyrek devotes himself to writing religious hymns; Grosz is a master of the grotesque.



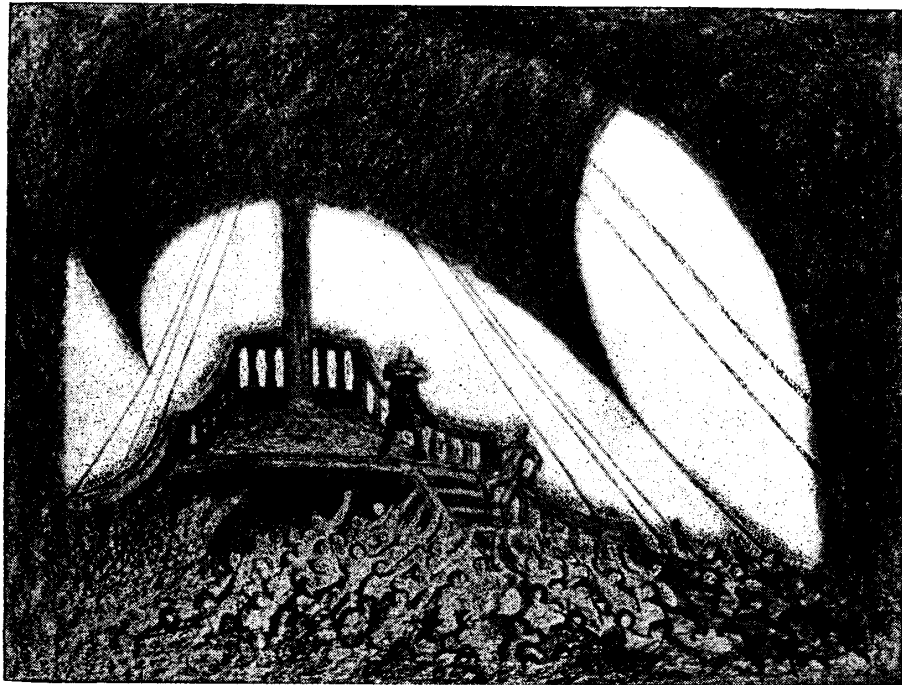
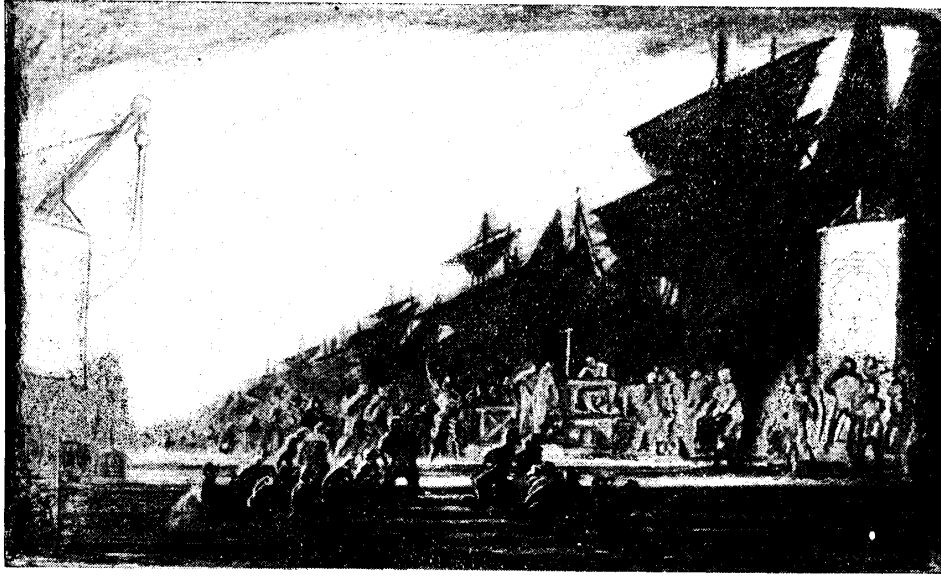
There is still another boundary line today, between music that is "new" and that which is merely contemporary. So far we have named only the radical composers or those associated with them as followers. Among the others, however, we must at least mention the most significant. There is Josef Marx, well known for his colorful, lyrical works for orchestra. Franz Schmidt, at present the director of the Austrian State University of Music, is a composer of operas and also of symphonic music, and a man who really has something to say in the conventional forms. Max Springer directs the State Academy and is renowned as a Catholic Church musician. E. W. Korngold, first introduced as a child prodigy, is known beyond the borders of Germany and Austria by his impressive operas. Hans Gal derives from Brahms, but has developed great independence. Now he is directing the Music Academy in Mainz. Egon Kornauth composes chiefly in the Dutch East Indies. He stems from Mahler and shows a rich, natural fancy. Ernst Toch, for a long time resident in Germany, is winning increasing fame. Otto Siegl, similarly exiled, composes remarkable chamber and choral music. Walter Klein is one of the spiritual leaders of the Viennese musicians, and also one of their best theoreticians. Joseph Messner, church organist in Salzburg, has won his way, through



FOUR SCENES FROM CHRISTOPHE COLOMB

DESIGNED BY PANOS ARAVANTINOS

This opera by Darius Milhaud and Paul Claudel was introduced to Berlin in April



several important works, to a greater clarity. Bernhard Paumgartner, director of the Salzburg Mozarteum, has produced several successful operas, and has also written a fine work on Mozart. An unusual musical figure is Julius Bittner, who created the Austrian Folk Opera. Alma Maria Mahler, widow of Gustave Mahler, has published songs that reveal an independent talent.

These are but a few, by no means all the names. Their great number, however, does not merely indicate that music is still being written in our country. It also reveals a great variety. What is internationally recognized today as the New Music is completely absent from Austria. But the concepts of this very same new music were first defined in Austria and will still continue to be so determined. We realize that all conditions are better in foreign countries than in Austria itself, where the musician faces more than material difficulties. Not enough is done for the production of works that do not flatter the populace. Only when that is accomplished will we be able to build up the public that is our outstanding need.