

ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG'S
QUARTET IN D MINOR
Op. 7



AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BY

KURT SCHINDLER

AS DELIVERED BY HIM AT THE PRIVATE PERFORMANCE
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INDEX OF MUSICAL THEMES



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ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG'S
QUARTET IN D MINOR Op. 7



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ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG'S

QUARTET IN D MINOR (Op. 7)

The Flonzaley Quartet and Mr. de Coppet have honored me by asking me to preface to-night's first American performance of the Schönberg Quartet by a few words on the composer and his work. Such an introduction seems necessary, because the musical public has been misled—through continuous reports from abroad in dailies and periodicals—to expect from Schönberg nothing but musical futurism or cubism, with all those grotesque and ridiculous features made known here by last season's picture exhibit in the Armory. Now, the very fact that the Flonzaleys with their fine record of noble and inspired music should have chosen to perform this arduous work—which necessitated, for reasons that we shall later understand, a vast number of rehearsals—should go far to convince us that there must be some fine and great qualities in this music. Yet there are reasons why, at a single hearing like this one, it may miss its appeal to layman and musician alike. First of all, the duration of the work, fifty-two minutes in a stretch without interruption; second, the incapacity of our ears to take in so many new and strange sonorities at once; third (and most important), the fact that the opening ten minutes of the music are the hardest to understand because the boldest in construction, and almost cruel in the inexorable logic of the part-writing.

It is an indisputable fact, that in the trend and rush of modern times chamber-music has not the same chance as other branches of music. It is heard at long intervals, and between the first performance of a work and its second hearing there may be a lapse of years—indeed, if the first one failed to convince the hearers, there might be no repetition at all. Quite the con-

trary at the opera, where between the première and the conclusion of the five subscribers' nights critical opinion has a chance to settle and clarify itself, and where it may happen that the same person who felt nothing but mistrust and misgivings about a new opera, turns out to be its most enthusiastic supporter and champion.

Now, if such misgivings in some particular case were based on the fact that a certain opera-composer's last years were obscured and degraded, and on distrust of the Parisian propaganda preceding the performance, there might be similar reasons to approach Schönberg with caution, since no other musician has been so widely represented as insane, as a nervous wreck, as an impossible creature altogether; and, moreover, a clique of Viennese pupils and enthusiasts have made a verbose propaganda for him, which, in the pretentious affectation of its stilted style, has a somewhat nauseating effect upon those who are seeking for the truth about Schönberg.

I have mentioned all this to show how difficult it is to approach his work with equanimity, with the attitude of reverence for a lofty message. And yet, it is just this attitude which the Flonzaleys bid you take to-day, because they have faith in the work, and have done a herculean task in preparing this performance, which, besides the technical difficulties, requires uncommon physical endurance and a keeping of pitch for a whole hour, a hard task for stringed instruments. Let us forget that unscrupulous wealthy publishers have been working up a commercial boom for Schönberg abroad, as if he were naught but a "bluff," inviting the world to be stunned by odd noises and cacophonies. Such advertising, although it heralds the name of the composer throughout the whole world, invariably has the effect of disgusting the finer souls, as has been experienced in the case of Richard Strauss, too. Let us rather listen to the judgment of men like Mahler and Busoni. The late Gustav Mahler inserted a stipulation in his will, that the stipend for needy musicians, which bears his name, should be given first to Schönberg as the most worthy; while Busoni, the most unselfish and helpful among present-day musicians, has championed with word and deed the cause of the younger artist, even to the

detriment and neglect of his own compositions. I know from a musical critic of Berlin, that it was really Busoni who took the initial and decisive steps in wooing for Schönberg publishers, players, singers and conductors, money and recognition alike; so I was not surprised, when I asked Mr. Betti who first drew his attention to this Quartet, to hear that it was Busoni, who, during his last trip in America, spoke long and fervently to him of this neglected work. Such unselfish deeds the contemporaneous world rarely acknowledges, leaving it to posterity to acclaim their true worth, as in the case of Liszt with Wagner.

While the world at large has thus heard of Schönberg in the last two years, and America especially since Mr. Huneke's letter to the Sunday Times last winter, he has been by no means an unknown quantity to the musicians and artists of Berlin and Vienna for as long as twelve years. Arnold Schönberg is a native of Vienna, where he was born thirty-nine years ago (1874). His first works were songs, a string-sextet called "Verklärte Nacht" (Enchanted Night), and a big orchestral composition, the "Gurre-Lieder," for soli, chorus and greatly augmented orchestra, which, except some details of orchestration, were finished as far back as 1900. In 1901 he went to Berlin, at a call from Ernst von Wolzogen, who needed a *Kapellmeister* and "composer" for his artistic vaudeville, known to fame as the *Überbrettel*. There was but scanty occupation for a man of such serious and lofty aims as Schönberg in this enterprise, and he left it almost immediately. Through the influence of Richard Strauss, who had seen some of his manuscripts, and among them sketches for a symphonic poem "Pelléas and Mélisande," he received an appointment as teacher of theory at the Stern Conservatory in Berlin. Strauss was quite interested in the young innovator, and I remember a characteristic little episode:—While at a private party, Strauss was being complimented for the extraordinary skill and complications of his own scores, upon which he exclaimed, with a singular mixture of sarcasm and naïve admiration: "Children, that is nothing at all! There is a young man of Vienna who leaves us all behind; he needs sixty-five staves for his scores, for which he has his music-paper specially printed, and I told him that I myself could not

make head or tail of them." These remarks naturally excited my curiosity about Schönberg, and an opportunity to meet him came two years later, in 1904, when I spent three spring months in Vienna. There I was introduced by chance to a circle of young musicians, who had grouped themselves around Alexander von Zemlinsky and Schönberg (brothers-in-law, by the way) as their leaders. It would be hard to describe the admiration which these musicians enjoyed from their young followers, from whose idealizing descriptions one might have thought the composers demigods; but what a bitter disappointment it was to behold them visually! Zemlinsky, small, haggard, wretched from starvation and overwork; Schönberg, like a pale Pierrot, short, bald, with a restless, nervous look and abrupt manners. Strange recollection that I cherish: A meeting in the backroom of a Viennese café, at which the "Society of Creative Musicians" was founded, with these two gentlemen as president and vice-president, with Oscar Posa as secretary, and at which, among others, the lamented Erich Wolff was present.

Schönberg, at that time, was utterly destitute; in fact he continued in this plight until last year. Yet he kept on writing complicated and impracticable scores, without the slightest faltering or compromise, ready to die for his art, and thus compelling even the unwilling to admire his heroism. It is sometimes good to call attention, in America, to the fact that such things are possible in Europe and finally win the victory, because *there* an idealism and a belief in the consecration of the artist answer to the cry in the wilderness, if it be loud enough. A man who should venture out, here in America, thus heedless of practical considerations, would be utterly lost. With a few notable exceptions, the opinion prevails that he who cannot make money cannot be worth much and cannot be "up-to-date." The idea, that instead of being up-to-date a man might be ahead-of-date, would hardly occur.

After "Pélleas and Mélisande" there followed in 1905 the string-quartet in D minor, which we shall hear to-night; further, six songs with orchestra; two ballads in 1906; the "Kammer-sinfonie"; a choral work for a *cappella* voices, called "Peace on Earth"; in 1908 another string-quartet in F sharp minor; fifteen

more songs; and in the last four years the melodrama *Pierrot lunaire*, nine piano pieces, and five small pieces for orchestra, which gave rise to sensational outbreaks of temper among the public and critics in London and elsewhere, lately in Chicago, too. Then there are the now completed score of the "Gurre-Lieder," a work of tremendous dimensions for a colossal apparatus of chorus and orchestra, and two small essays in music-drama, not performed yet, but, to judge from the book of words, exceedingly modern, sophisticated, obscure. He wrote his libretti himself; they seem to tend in the direction of the visionary drama of Maeterlinck, and are characteristic of the man through the extraordinarily precise indications of colors and gestures required.

This is where another side of the composer's complex personality enters:—Schönberg, the artist, the painter. For the visions that haunt him, for the moods that besiege him, he needs an outlet other than music, and while in his music he is always constructive, logical, almost mathematical, he gives free rein to his fancies when he paints. Here we have visions, faces with peering eyes that look you through and through, from beyond a veil, like those of Carrère, strange fabulous animals like Odilon Redon's, and bizarre, sharply-cut silhouettes similar to Van Gogh's.

Like most of the modern school of Viennese *painters*, Schönberg is directly under the influence of the French impressionists and post-impressionists; like most of the Viennese *poets* he looks up to Verlaine, Verhaeren and Maeterlinck and all the other mystics of French literature; *but*—and now we come to the important point—in *his music*, although he knows and betrays his knowledge of César Franck, Debussy, Ravel and others, although he often attains similar results, especially through abundant use of whole tones, he works on an *absolutely different principle*. This principle might be called *freedom from pre-conceived notions of harmony*, sacrifice of beauty to logic, of harmony to thematic completeness. That incidentally he thus finds new harmonic combinations (since the old ones would not do for such utter freedom) is only a side-issue, although it is probably the most tangible feature at a first hearing. But harmony is never the principle aim, as it is with Debussy, who merely

intoxicates his ear with some new and beautiful sonority. Modern French music, with few exceptions, is homophonic, Schönberg is essentially polyphonic.

This holds good of the three distinct periods in which I can classify Schönberg's productions from 1900 to 1913.

There is first an early period of seeking for romantic effects, for coloristic touches, not quite free from some sweet Viennese sentimentalities, and decidedly under the influence of Wagner's music-dramas and the Strauss of "*Heldenleben*" and "*Domestica*."

There is a second period of earnest and ascetic concentration, when, by the study of Bach and the later Beethoven, Schönberg comes to the conviction that everything must be melody, every thematic voice must live its individual life, when—in order to weave a melodious fabric as fine as Beethoven's last utterances, but without sacrificing his own modern Psyche to a slavish pseudo-classical imitation—he has to invent an enlarged system of harmony of his own. This treatise of harmony, which he developed while bitterly earning his living as a teacher, is published in book-form; it has met with most thorough investigation and consideration from learned theorists in Europe, and establishes beyond a doubt that here there is at least a good deal of system and method, if there be madness.

Finally, there is the last period of the little piano and orchestra pieces, mood-pictures, strange, grotesque, intimidating. I heard the piano pieces in Paris, and must affirm that the impression, already described and ridiculed by others, was also mine—that is, that apparently the wrongest tone possible, the wrongest harmony thinkable, was always struck; also, that after some minutes, I became convinced that a logical order prevailed in these rhythmical, fantastic puzzles, to which I could not find the key.

I heard the five orchestra pieces under Mr. Stock in Chicago two months ago, with a similar result, only in this case, besides the dazzling coloration of the instruments, the ear was often fascinated by the most capricious, insistent rhythms, technical fireworks almost dazing and perturbing. "*Études*" for orchestra, as mood-pictures, a magnified counterpart of Chopin's Piano *Études*.

It is the works of this last period that have provoked such a storm of indignation and protest in Europe. The phenomenon of the continually alternating success and failure of Schönberg is thus easily explained: Where the *Gurre-Lieder*, dating from 1900, are now performed for the first time, the public is amazed and delighted by the wealth of good old-fashioned melody and harmony that prevails in them; if a work like to-night's String-quartet, dating from the second period (1907), is given, those who have studied the score must bow in reverence to so much knowledge and a logic based on classic traditions;—but in the latest compositions all precedents seem abolished, we enter a *terra incognita*, and to all appearances an utterly barren, desolate, unfriendly land, the musical Antarctic, so to say. No unprejudiced person can deny that this is ugly, after a first hearing.

Whether or no the Schönberg of to-day be mad, is not a question for us to decide to-night. The Quartet in D minor still stands on the firm ground of classical traditions, and in order to facilitate an understanding of its form, I can do no better than to quote some excerpts from Mr. Betti's own analysis of the work. He says: "By the audacity of its form, and by its psychological content, this quartet is directly linked to the last ones of Beethoven. In this work Schönberg takes up and develops (sometimes pushing them to the extreme) most of the principles established so boldly ninety years ago by the master of Bonn in his last instrumental compositions, namely, *greatest liberty of form, absolute independence of part-writing, the employment of the instruments in all their varied registers* (often in the extreme ones). To this Schönberg adds effects of instrumentation, *ponticello, mute, harmonics*, and others, which, although much used in the modern orchestra, have found little or no application in quartet-writing. Finally—and this seems a complete innovation—Schönberg employs not *one Leitmotiv* (like Franck, Debussy and d'Indy) but *several*, which transform themselves according to the psychological development of the action, and run through the entire work, parallel to the procedures in the dramas of Wagner and the modern symphonic poems. Thus Schönberg seems to take his point of departure from Wagner and Liszt, just as Reger appears to continue Brahms, one taking up the

romantic traditions, the other the thread of the classics. It is the great liberty of form that makes this quartet so difficult to comprehend at one hearing. Actually, the sonata-type has undergone such a metamorphosis, that one has difficulty in finding the main pillars of the classical structure, hallowed by century-old custom. But if we search scrutinizingly, is there really such a great revolution? From the point of view of quartet-writing, evidently yes. But has not all this already been accomplished in the domain of the sonata for piano? And did not Beethoven himself pave the way with the genial audacities of his last works? As Wagner said in his monograph, Beethoven, with his impetuous temperament, suffered all his life long profoundly from the slavish fetters in which the musical forms held his genius, and which were as much torture to him as were all the other fetters of conventionality.

In his quartet Schönberg moulds all the single movements of the classical quartet into *one* big movement, the middle of which consists of a grandiose *Durchführung* (weaving together of all themes). This *Durchführung* shows the inner coherency of all the different themes moulded together. *Before* it comes the opening movement, sombre and violent, corresponding to the main part of a sonata, but enlarged by a long Fugato interpolated between the first and second themes, and by a Scherzo with its Trio. *After* the *Durchführung* comes the repetition of the opening theme, and after a long fermata a Fugato leads to the tender, moody Adagio, to the repetition of the second theme, and finally to a Rondo-Finale, whose themes are variations and inversions of previous motives, and which ends in a peaceful apotheosis.

A striking feature is the logic of construction. Everything is so marvellously linked, that in spite of its length, even after prolonged study of the work, not one measure seems superfluous; one must watch how Schönberg masterfully constructs an accompaniment out of fragments of a theme, how he introduces and prepares his themes, how he links one part to the other! And always thematically! One of Schönberg's pupils has rightly said: "*There is not one note, in this work, which does not find its justification in the thematic foundation.*" (It is particularly

striking, on examining the single parts of the players, to see that every man is at all times playing melodic phrases, never just filling in harmonious sounds.) As to the harmonic scheme of the work, it is very bold. The whole-tone scale, so dear to Debussy and his adepts, makes its appearance in several passages. Yet the general procedure is quite different from that of the young Frenchmen, and so is the effect.

With even the most modern among the French there is so much refinement in the preparation and dissolutions of dissonances, that the listeners' ears are *often surprised*—but *never really hurt*. Here we have a more frank, but also a more rude proceeding. There is a harshness of disharmony, which, although logical, shocks the ear. But many of these "Ohrfeigen für feige Ohren," as Hans von Bülow used to call them, are only consequences of the principle of Beethoven—absolute independence of parts—carried to the extreme. The term "Augenmusik" (music for the eye), which Theodor Helm used for Beethoven's great Fugue, might be applied to many a passage in Schönberg's Quartet, where the polyphony is too complex and where the result of the performance does not equal what the reading promised. Mr. Betti closes his little essay by calling attention to the fact, that—after all, speaking of revolutionaries in music—there is much less of a distance between Schönberg and the last quartets of Beethoven, than there was between Beethoven's Fugue Op. 133 and the idyllic beginnings of Haydn.

In our times of neuropathy and neurology we are all too quick in throwing the terms of "madness and insanity" at everything new and different. A hundred years ago people were satisfied with calling Beethoven a "Querkopf" (a crank). Now, a "Querkopf" Schönberg also surely is; whether he has as big a message to deliver as Beethoven had, we cannot decide, we may even sincerely doubt it; but that he has enriched our time and benefited musical life by the tremendous seriousness of his purpose, there can be no question.

The Flonzaleys have been the second quartet organization to take up this work, since the première by the Rosé Quartet of Vienna in 1907; and before coming to America, they have

already played it nine times in Europe—at their home on the shores of Lake Geneva, in Leipzig, Amsterdam and The Hague, in Mannheim, Berlin (in the composer's presence), and London. At the first performance of the *Rosés* in Vienna one of those sensational "Hetzen" happened, a kind of stampede characteristic of the Viennese, when they tried by hissing, stamping and ridiculing to stop the performance of the players. As it happened, some of the worst hissers sat behind Mr. Gustav Mahler, who turned sharply around and loudly asked them how dare they make such a noise. "Because the work displeases us," was the answer. Whereupon Mahler retorted, "If it is good enough for me to listen to attentively, then it's plenty good enough for you."

I tell this little story, not because we expect a similar demonstration here—this audience knows too well how to appreciate the work that the players have invested in such a performance to stop them in its midst—but because Mr. Betti has told me that he would like to know the temperature of the reception at the end, and that he was afraid this public would refrain from demonstrations—out of politeness.

So here you are at liberty; if you feel like applauding, testify to it vigorously; if you feel like hissing, hiss, by all means!



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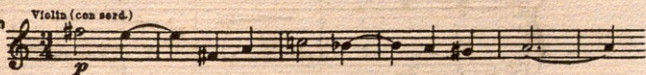
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Definitive
 Transformation
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