

Panayiotis Demopoulos - Composer / Performer

Table of contents

Introduction.....1

Part I

Background and History of the op.5.....3

Analysing Webern's op.5.....6

Part II

Analysis of the second movement.....9

Analysis of the third movement.....13

Some other issues concerning op.5.....15

Part III

Commentary and conclusion.....20

INTRODUCTION

The musical developments of the past 6 centuries reflect – with remarkable accuracy – their contemporary history. Particularly since the first post-enlightenment years - when music making attained a more specific social role – the art of composing became increasingly subordinate to societal conditions, and marked historical episodes clearly by reacting to them. In this light, it is easy to see how the first two decades of the twentieth century found music transforming dramatically.

Webern's opus 5, is one of the first pieces of 'Art music' to demonstrate the change from a positive time of invention, scientific achievement and spiritual rebirth to a time of misunderstanding. It is music of an active consciousness that questions the function of set reasoning. In the unity¹ that Webern intended, and in the abstraction that his music was aiming for, through the liberation of pitch height from fixed function, we can, perhaps even today, detect a human condition that feels more at home with rational abstraction and mystery than with teleological reasoning.

Ironically, these were times when "common sense" popular philosophy denounced any notion of mystery as backward-mindedness; surprisingly, almost a century later, the music retains the same descriptive accuracy of the despondency inherent in modern mass consciousness. Unfortunately, it is safe to assume that the bearers of that consciousness are still as incapable of admitting what Webern achieved in his music, as his contemporaries were.

¹ Since unity is such an important word in discussing this music, it is valuable to read Leo Black's comments on the translation of the German: "Unity=Zusammenhang. The German can imply both connections, relationships between entities or parts of the same entity, and also the relatedness, cohesion or unity brought about by these connections." (in Webern *The Path to the New Music*, translator's preface.

The two movements chosen for this paper are the part of the piece least discussed in music literature. Webern himself wrote very little about the actual construction of these pieces. Therefore, what will be attempted here is not to preclude the fact that the composer used specific techniques and thought in specific ways, but to display some of the connections and the relationships that become apparent analytically and aurally; regardless of their origins and their author's intentions, which could never be absolutely clear, perhaps initially not even to himself.²

² Webern writes on modulation and intention in musical construction: "I go out into the hall to knock a nail. On my way there I decide I'd rather stay out. I act on an impulse, get into a tram, come to a railway station, go on travelling and finally end up in America! That's modulation." (Webern, *The Path to the New Music* p.48).

PART I

Historical background and
introduction to the analysis of op.5

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF THE OP.5 MOVEMENTS FOR STRING QUARTET

Anton Friedrich Wilhelm von Webern was born in Vienna in 1883 and died in Mittersill, near Salzburg, in 1945. His life and background suggest that he was an unlikely bearer of great ideas, yet following his death, the post-war avant-garde established that he was one of the most important figures in 20th century European music. His total adherence to natural authority and faithful observation of abstract musical values appealed to those who aspired to pursue Art for the sake of Art. His creative musical life effectively started in 1903 when he met his mentor Arnold Schoenberg. In fact, it is fair to say that Schoenberg was to remain Webern's artistic prototype until the end of his life.

The years before Webern's graduation offer a considerable insight as to the development of his compositional approach. The string quartet of 1905 for instance, begins with the three-note motif C#-C-E; an 034 collection often employed and developed in op.5. It also shares the same chords and entire sonorities, which might have been borrowed and developed from this earlier work for the op.5 movements.

When this music's development from embryonic to mature state becomes historically perceptible as in the above case, it transpires that it is somehow irrelevant to attempt a classification of different periods in Webern's creative life. Clearly, a great many things changed from the writing of the *Passacaglia*, op.1 and earlier student pieces to the *Second Cantata*, yet this happened in one uninterrupted process. In this light, op.5 is not to be thought of as an early or transitional piece.³

Another factor, which is often not given the attention it deserves, in examining Webern's music, is the importance of his vocal music. Besides 26 unpublished and unnumbered songs, Webern's 17 out of 31 opus numbers are compositions that employ the human voice. This is a large proportion for any composer's output and it may convey truths

³ To stress this point, the high esteem that the op.5 pieces enjoyed in Webern's own mind, will be discussed in later paragraphs.

about his instrumental music⁴ concerning a wide range of issues, from technical matters, such as registers used, phrase length, and gestural mannerisms to the more essential, if abstract, issue of aesthetic value. This is a thought which demands that no further categorical assumption be made, but one which ought to be processed, when examining this composer's instrumental works.

In a letter to Alban Berg from 1912, Webern wrote, that all his compositions from the *Passacaglia* (1908) onwards related to the death of his mother in 1906. The *Five Movements for String Quartet* op.5, composed in 1909 certainly belong to this group of works and they may even contain biographical programmatic undertones as some commentators suggest.⁵ From a technical perspective, the op.5 pieces are likely to have been a direct response to what Schoenberg was doing at the time. During 1908-1909 Webern composed music surprisingly similar in scope to the music Schoenberg had just completed writing. Both composers wrote music for voice on texts by Stefan George (Schoenberg first) and Schoenberg's op.11 piano pieces preceded and were remarkably akin to Webern's op.5.

All the above may conveniently serve to define the chasm between two worlds. On the one hand lay the realm of the thoroughly exploited Germanic tonal idiom which originated in medieval polyphony⁶, reached its culmination twice in the High-baroque and late classicism and decayed gradually through the excesses and often antithetical dialects of the late romantics. And on the other hand, the manner was anticipated, which followed Schoenberg's first wholly chromatic, so-called atonal designs and ultimately resulted in total serialism. This is, of course, a convenient, yet crude divide one may choose to accept or reject.

⁴ In the same sense that Mahler was a symphonist, but one whose treatment of melody was always unmistakably vocal; Webern's idolatry of Mahler being, incidentally, noted, it makes the argument all the more so relevant.

⁵ See Moldenhauer, p.123

⁶ Webern's authority to maintain an opinion on this music, was derived by a profound knowledge of this tradition; after completing his thesis on medieval composer Heinrich Isaac, Webern often employed pre-baroque elements in his compositional technique and possessed a rare understanding of Flemish polyphony and what followed it.

It is in fact quite unnecessary to define a historical place for the op.5 pieces narrowly, for they share much with both their ancestry and their offspring. No author ever consciously composes “transitional works”; consequently the op.5 pieces must not be obliged to belong historically, nor seen as link or as divide. By introducing a new archetype of structural ergonomics and maintaining many of the Germanic tonal characteristics, they acquire an inward intention that defies categorisation.

What is, on the contrary, necessary, is to clarify the designation of the piece; is it a string quartet, or an assortment of short string quartet pieces? Webern himself is unclear on this; at all times he maintains that this is a string quartet by referring to it as such without the slightest reluctance. On the other hand, he did insist that the title be *Fünf sätze*, (*Five Movements*), which suggests that these pieces are tableaux, as it were, comprising a set, but not one conventional multi-movement piece. There are other facts that support this view. Adorno writes: “Webern explained that the quartet pieces op.5...were chosen from a large number of such creations”.⁷ If this is true, then a much looser method of putting movements together is indicated.

On the contrary, Igor Stravinsky, an admirer of Webern late in his life, condemns this designation: “...each opus offers itself only as a whole, a unity to be contemplated...it is possible to feel constricted when listening to a succession of, especially, the very short pieces...I consider this attempt to follow a chain of, as I say, unities, to be a quantitative mistake...”⁸.

A final perspective, which may verge on the brink of exaggeration for the sceptic, may serve to reconcile the above. Given Webern’s preoccupation with unity, it may be unorthodox but also fair to claim that his whole output is in one sense a single entity. This notion could account for the fact that even if 5 pieces for the same medium were drawn

⁷ Adorno, *Klangfiguren*, p.168 in Kolneder, 54

⁸ Modelnhauer, xxii

out of a “selection”⁹ they maintain such unity as to force Stravinsky to view them as one entity.

The work was composed in June 1909 for the occasion of “Wilhelmine’s birthday”¹⁰ and received its premiere in February 1910 by an unidentifiable quartet¹¹. The 5 pieces enjoyed many more performances than most of Webern’s other works before his death. This is not to say that they were particularly popular with concert audiences although they were certainly controversial. In a concert including the work, held in Prague in 1922, a loud argument erupted during the fourth movement. Wilhelm Grosz, a composer objected to the music by shouting “Furchtbar!” (Terrible!) to which the architect Adolf Loos a good friend of the Second Viennese composers, and advocate of new music responded “Maulhalten!” (Shut up!) What followed was disorder in the concert hall and an abrupt close to the concert, which had to be repeated for a close circle of musicians the following day.

Events of this quarrelsome nature were of course common in those days and they did not by any means affect the composer’s resolve. Webern seems to have been happy enough about the frequent performances the piece received and about its lasting effect years after he composed it: “It is now a quartet of a century since I wrote it...it is only now that I myself can exactly account for what I did then. Yet it seems to me that I listened to it the other day, no differently from the way I listened to it 25 years ago.”¹²

Webern expressed his contentedness with the work further, by orchestrating the pieces years later, scarcely holding back from admiring the new arrangement he produced. In his correspondence from 1944 he wrote: “... I can only say: what a lot of conductor gentlemen are missing!...I think people will be astonished...”¹³ Given that Webern did

⁹ Moreover, this alleged statement of Webern’s to Adorno is curiously inconsistent with the established view that the quartet must have been written in “one sweep” (see Moldenhauer, p. 123). Perhaps, Adorno is referring to the *Six Bagatelles*.

¹⁰ Wilhelmine Mortl later became Webern’s wife.

¹¹ The Rosé quartet is mentioned as the first to perform, and they indeed gave a more formal concert in Vienna in April 1911.

¹² Webern, ed, Polnauer, §53, p.28

¹³ in Kolneder, pp.166-7

not orchestrate any other of his numbered works and that in this arrangement not very much is altered apart from the size of performing forces, it is possible that he was intending the work for orchestra in the first place. In any event, what is certain is that both versions remain valuable for the listener and musician of today.

ANALYSING WEBERN'S OPUS 5

The *Five Movements for String Quartet* are today considered to be a prime example of atonal music. Schoenberg's dislike for the term 'atonal' is well-known, yet the label remains. Already in trying to give a very vague term to the style of the music, it becomes apparent that extra-musical assertion results in hubris, or, to put it more mildly verbal assertion equals error. In fact all extra-musical assertion concerning this music seems to equal error. And yet analysis is not anathema to Art, neither is it the instrument of "zealots of explanation who want to deny the Arts their mystery" as one critic suggests.¹⁴ On the contrary it is potentially the only tool that may shed light on the more enigmatic virtues of Art, with the inherent capacity not to intrude into the mysteries of Art.

In music like Webern's analysis becomes necessary; in truth analysis and synthesis are very difficult to distinguish as two antithetical values. But this point requires elaboration and rational substantiation: if outward articulation, i.e. expression, lies at the heart of the Art which defies analysis, then Webern's music may not qualify as such Art. For him, true Art is found in austere, but eloquent economy and emancipation of music from all exogenous claims: "We must come to believe that the only road onwards is inwards...every heart colours differently its evening when it sets."¹⁵ he wrote commenting on Art.

Naturally, in practical terms, such Art, originating and ending in subjectivity, introversion and total musical abstraction, may develop into a cryptic Art, a labyrinth of thoughts or

¹⁴ Denis Donoghue in Dunsby and Whittall, p.5

¹⁵ Letter to Hildegard Jone, quoting her writing, Webern, ed. Polnauer, §4, p.10

even a game in which a chosen few may participate. Surely, such elitist Art cannot be what Webern aspired to. But this is the most basic of misconceptions. For all the polemics against such music derive from the misconception that music needs to function as a set of aural symbols, a bearer of ideas and concepts. In Webernian terms, music ought to be liberated from semantic rule and perform its true and unconstrained role as a *mysterium* in human experience.

Subsequently, the only way in which the listener may eliminate the misconception that discredits this music as being calculated and remote, is to be drawn into musical performance and abstract analysis, not critical literature, nor musico-philological attempts.

Composers of that exciting and expectant time often subscribed to this point themselves. Ernst Krenek spoke of “one of the most important experiences of my {his}life...” and of “...being able to appreciate beauty...¹⁶after studying this music analytically”, and Webern himself asserted that “music is a language. A human being wants to express ideas in this language, but not ideas that can be translated into concepts – musical ideas.”¹⁷ At best, what one can do, is to illustrate this music in words, not to contaminate its logic by characterising it. The most objective way to describe a subjective creation, or comment on an Artwork, is to narrate the mechanics that it employs and to minimise all extra-musical appendage.

That is no easy task, when using language, as it tends to imply and connote values that share little with the content it describes. However, in such a complex, condense and deliberately non-semantic Art, where brevity demands impossible levels of concentration and whereby autonomy and economy are the focal musical elements, the listener needs to know more about the method and the set of Laws involved in the Artwork.¹⁸

¹⁶ Krenek quoted in Kolneder, p.55

¹⁷ Webern, pp.42-3

¹⁸ It is worth noting here that the second half of the words economy and autonomy is

In conclusion, a dichotomy may be made between pure analysis and musical experience, even in this music; but not, however, before one possesses the aural command required for hearing what is fundamental in the music. And often - as is the case with op.5 - this degree of musical command may only be earned through the type of analysis that follows.

Nomos: Law, Melody in ancient Greek. Interestingly, Webern, discusses the very word in *The Path to the New Music*.

PART TWO

Analysis of movements ii and iii of the op.5 string quartet

ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND MOVEMENT

The second of the five movements is a slow, expressive design, focusing on octatonic and whole-tone juxtapositions.¹⁹ When the vertical quantities increase, the mix of octatonic and whole-tone colours form new schemata and sounds, but because of the initial exposition (first four beats, before the fermata), they tend to be heard in relation to whole-tone and octatonic formations. After a second hearing, when the octatonic ending is anticipated, this becomes even clearer.

More specifically, the movement unfolds in the following distinct periods:

Introduction: opening-first two beats of bar 1

A: third beat of bar 1-first beat of bar 4

Transition: second beat of bar 4 to end of bar 4

B: first beat of bar 5-first two beats of bar 7

C: third beat of bar 7-first three beats of bar 9

Transition: fourth beat of bar 9-first beat of bar

Coda: a) D: second beat of bar 10-first two beats of bar 12,

b) Codetta: third beat of bar 12-end

The first six beats serve as the prologue as it were. The viola states a whole-tone 046 melody while the second violin and the cello spell an 0367 cell which may be heard as an altered minor triad with a suspension or as two whole-tone intervals. What is also of significance here is the instrumentation, which aids the obscuring of the intervallic values and unifies the sound into one shade. The whole of this opening statement could very well be written as follows, making a performance easier, (ex.1) yet Webern chooses to demand the more elaborate texture for the sake of a darker timbre.

For the purposes of this analysis we should name whole-tone collections based on C WTb

¹⁹ For Webern's own words on whole-tone juxtapositions read *The Path to twelve-tone composition, III and IV*.

and those based on C# WTa (a has been used for the C# as it appears first in the viola melody). In musical terms what has thus far been uttered is an exclamation, an introductory statement. In motivic terms, nonetheless, most of what follows is a transformation of this initial statement.

Before moving on it may be useful to present the appearances of 0367 through the movement and thus display how one cell makes numerous dependent appearances, that may not be discussed extensively in the course of the analysis of the primary elements which constitute the movement.

0367 appears a number of times, even though never in its initial chordal form. It sometimes suggests the two aforementioned whole-tone colours and other times an octatonic trace (which it implies by default).

Its T5 occurs in the viola line in bar 4. This may be an occurrence that is obscured by other more prominently and immediately distinctive collections, it is nevertheless an occurrence without doubt. It leads to the step-by-step appearance of T9 in bar 5 (F B-F#-D). The familiarity that the tone of D has obtained at this point is not only due to the cello line in bar 4 but also due to the viola 0367 (T5, bar 4) and its focus on D.

In the fourth section of the movement the 0367 collection appears again this time as two fragments of two violin phrases in bars 7 and 8 (B-G#-D#-D - T6).²⁰

Finally, the collection appears in the coda, as the conclusive colour. Over the lower part texture, which has its epicentre on an A minor chord the violin lines voice their sentences around a D#/Eb. Consequently the 0367 use here is evident, but also symptomatic of the octatonic context in which it appears.

Going back to the beginning and the direct analysis of the sections, a triptych of “cadence points” appears following the opening passage. The tension-release principle, carefully scrutinised and denounced in many atonal analyses may not be similarly treated in this

¹ What transpires as a result of identifying possible 0367 sets is that the composer fragments the cells he is using thus giving life and transforming the material without restricting its use, while maintaining a high level of tonal and sonic (non-motivic) cohesion.

analysis²¹: probably caused by the slow speed of the music, a very strange condition permeates the phrasing here.²² On the one hand, as Arnold Schoenberg noted, and Webern certainly thought, one must only: “use the means that are indispensably necessary to the production of a particular result...all else is purposeless...”²³ Without doubt such economy tends to regard embellishment as the least useful of melodic devices. On the other hand the rhythm alone of the phrase in bars 2-3 suggests a gesture, semantic by nature and one in which there are primary and secondary melodic elements. To say then, that an appoggiatura is used, is to suggest that a harmonic note may be preceded by a passing note. One could go on to refuse that this may be so, but on hearing the music, one can no longer pretend that this is not so. Consequently, any such melodic shape encompasses the tension and release axiom as fundamental. It will be shown indirectly over the course of the paper that this axiom is treated in a unique way, yet its presence is often aurally undisputed.

The viola line unfolds on a symmetrical 034 at first (ex.2a) and then sighs away all three times, with a reduced number of notes each time, so that eventually only the sigh remains (7, 6 and 5 quaver beats respectively). The reason that the symmetry of the 034 melody is aided by a note in the second violin is that this note is borrowed by the WTa colour in the accompaniment. (ex.2b)

Finally, it deserves noting that in the opening gesture F and Ab were notes of the 0367 accompaniment whereas now they are elements of the melody and that vice versa the WTa colour was melodic whereas now it has become the accompaniment. (ex.2c).

The second phrase may be seen in two ways, depending on the amount of decorative tones one wishes to see, or avoid hearing for that matter. Hence, the four notes may be viewed as a 0126 collection, or a combination of a chromatic cell with Wta. (this collection occurs again at pitch in bar 6 as discussed later). Certainly the sound of this phrase is without mistake a WTa melody with a decorative upbeat (F#), especially as it is

²¹ Webern found tension and release to suggest tonal hierarchy; he does however accept what is meant today by tension and release by referring to the notion of relationship degrees.

²² This condition also facilitates the reversal of roles, of consonance and dissonance; i.e. the last four beats of the movement.

supported by a WTa harmony (046-0246). The same applies to a lesser degree in the final phrase in bar 3, as the underlying harmony is a supplementary, juxtaposed WTb {046(9)-046(7)}. What may not be immediately discernible is a very refined correspondence between the rhythmic diminution in the viola line, mentioned in the previous paragraph, and the part motion in the accompaniment which is intervallically augmented with the highest note lowering by one tone, the middle by two and the bass by a tritone.²⁴ (ex.3).

But even if in total faith in aural impression, the whole-tone relationships have so far been prominent, but also corrupt by chromatic intrusions. Their establishment as something more substantial comes in bar 4, when the cello momentarily obtains a melodic role pronouncing a chromatic ascent while the viola continues its part on 012. Thus it is clarified that the previously unidentifiable 0126 (end of bar 2) is really a combination of 012 and 026. This moment, bar 4 that is, serves as an interlude in the structure with its architectural counterpart being the last beat of bar 9 and the first of bar 10. This chromatic material will soon become primary in the following section, yet the function of bar 4 is unquestionably transitory.²⁵

The first transition section is of course anticipated and elaborate in itself; the 012 collection has virtually commenced on the bass C# of the cello in the preceding bar. What happens in bar 4 is a timbral agitation of the collection and its development into double symmetrical formations. The voices close in and the pizzicato of the symmetrical 0156 “resolves” by tone movement into another juxtaposition of WTa and WTb. Much of this amalgamation of chords or subsets in the movement can be seen in relation to the axis of WTa+b as shown below (ex.4).

Other juxtapositions of Wta and WTb occur in the next bar (ex.5). The sound of the 0367 from the previous bar centred around D still lingers when the two violins come in unison.

²³ Schoenberg, *Harmonielehre*, p.325, Vienna, 1922.

²⁴ On the more cryptic use of symmetry, Webern writes: “Beethoven’s six variations on Swiss song...{a description of an obscured symmetry follows}... You won’t notice this when the piece is played and perhaps it isn’t all that important [that you will not], but it’s unity”, in *the Path to the New Music*, p.52.

²⁵ To this subscribes the rhythmic relaxation, the *ritenuto* and the use of pizzicato, often employed as a punctuation sign or musical comma in this music.

Hence the upper voice of the two chords preceding this entry can be seen as an aeolian cadence, with a whole-tone leading interval. (ex.6) This is the reason why the D in the violins sounds as part of the 0367 mentioned earlier, even though the chord never actually occurs.

Here (bar 5 onwards), Webern compensates for the increased tension in the lower parts with moving the melody line from the viola to the violin. The first note of this new phrase of the melody emerges from chord 0156 and is again part of WTb initially, and then moves onto 012. What we see in the second part of the phrase is an 034 block, as that of bars 1-2 but what we effectively hear is 012 with a decoration derived from WTb and belonging to the first part of the phrase; even more so when the next three notes attest to this sound by repeating the cell (ex.7).

What is far more easily perceptible is the juxtaposition of the two WT sets, most obviously in the first beat of bar 6 where accompaniment is in WTa and melody in WTb. The first violin returns with the semitone “leitmotif” of bar 5 and then the second transition takes place. The main elements of this are the extreme lowering of the register and an oscillating rhythmic pattern (ex. 8). In purely musical terms what happens in this transition is a diminution of the type we encountered in bars 1-3 in the viola. First a semitone rise and a minor ninth fall occur in the first violin, then the same motion takes place an octave lower in the second violin with the fall being in inversion (major seventh). Finally only the fall is played by the viola. Intervallic diminution, phrasal diminution, rhythmic diminution and registral diminution all occur at the same time, while the values of the more subtle elements of the music, that is tension and harmonic rate progress to the contrary in augmentation (ex.9).

Out of this emerges the WTa ostinato accompaniment of section D. Its tonal centre is owed to the transition and it relates both to the opening and to the ending of the movement where the tone of F is prominent (an octave lower in those instances). There is a sense that all the previous sections were interrupted and that the piece finally gets underway, most likely because of the rhythmic regularity in the cello. For someone who

cannot look at the score this could be the opening of the main body of the movement, with the previous sections being the introductory formalities. This makes the next interruption poetically significant, a reminder of the inevitable, gesture-bound nature of the music. The first violin is at last given the opportunity to be the melodic instrument, thus the music opens more; this progression in the melody from viola to violin II to violin I cannot be mistaken for unintentional. To denote this intention the words: “mit zartestem Ausdruck” - with delicate expression, “molto espress.” and “auberst zart” - with outermost tenderness/expression, accompany the music in the opening of the respective solo lines.

Moreover, bars 7 to 9 are particularly fluent as they indulge in a more horizontally determined writing, thus the music acquires a linear momentum it has not had previously. The melody starts off with five notes that both constitutes a whole-tone embellished phrase²⁶, and contains a cell that is further developed and the 0367 collection of the opening chord. (ex.10) After a closer examination however, it emerges that there are more complex patterns forming underneath the surface, which contribute greatly to a sense of cohesion.²⁷

The symmetries inherent in the dialogue which follows between the two outer parts is then conclusive but not abrupt or foreign to the flow, as it is organically derived from the previous phrase. Similarly the next section picks up where the ostinato left. The seemingly asymmetrical phrase in the first violin is - in commencing with a 0125 - making bar three clearer as to intention and economy; it connects as it were in retrospect the two phrases of bars 2 and 3 a posteriori by merging parts of them (ex.11).

Once more, the first thing one notices about the final passage is the plagal sound that the VIc-ib evokes in the cello and viola. The final two bars are written in straight octatonic mode, with the initial mood of subdued serenity²⁸ returning thanks to the impenetrable

²⁶ The whole-tone sound is further emphasized because of the whole-tone interval of the accompaniment ostinato.

²⁷ These relationships are discussed in detail in the third part of the Analysis section, p.

²⁸ as the text also suggests: verklingend -kaum horbar: dying sound - scarcely audible.

and unresolving nature of the octatonic sound and not least thanks to the registral choices made and the absence of the first violin.

ANALYSIS OF THE THIRD MOVEMENT

The third movement begins and ends on the tone of C#. This causes a cyclic condition, indeed an ABA²⁹ structure is clearly implied upon hearing the piece, which lasts only 35''. What compensates, or rather demands for this brevity is a sense of conflict between the energetic, off-the-beat dislocation of chords, passages and whole canonic sections and the endeavor of the regular monotones of the bass and ostinato figures to affirm rhythmic precision.

The character and texture of the music as well as the motivic manipulation, distinctly define the sections of the movement. These may be roughly determined as follows:

A: bar 1-first two beats of bar 8

B: third beat of bar 8-end of bar 15

A: bar 15-end

In the first section there are three episodes. The first runs from the opening to the end of bar 3. It is a question and reply episode, where the most significant cell that will be developed in the movement is presented in the three higher parts. The collection 034 appearing in the last semi-quaver beat of bar 1 remains undisturbed in the following bar as the parts move in parallel minor sixths.³⁰ This gesture repeats and then a pizzicato answer leads to the second episode, a kind of counter-subject. This answer in its turn occurs at a higher register and employs a descending group of 034 chords (ex.12).

²⁹ The return of A is not understood in motivic or tonal terms, but purely in terms of character; the two outer sections share an affinity with a tone centricity which the flux of the middle section opts to defy.

³⁰ The minor sixth, being an interval of an 034 set in itself, creates more unity between the chords as the two notes played by every instrument and another tone which appears in the three high parts of these first two bars can make up for another 034 collection. Similarly in bars 5 and 8, the major seventh functions in the same way. (again an interval of 014/034). This quality of the melodic motion must, however, remain a

In the second episode the second basic element of the movement appears, a canon, here in straight imitation on the fifth. The phrase that is played in canon consists of two cells, an 023 minor collection and a whole-tone response (ex.13a). Their later use will be rather more extensive. The whole of the first section may be seen as an introduction and three interrupted canons. The first interruption comes in bar 5 when an 034 interval and its major seventh ascent improve on the opening statement of the collection by way of a clearer timbral focus and a more prolonged rhythm (13b). Then the second canon appears, this time on 034 bearing itself in its most lucid form (13c). Following that, an 034 set occurs both vertically and horizontally before the final canon of section A (13d). This is perhaps the climax of the section, and final episode with the dynamic shape reaching a peak and with the pedal disappearing and the texture focusing on extremes, bare of any mid-field sounds. It seems at first, that an endecatonic symmetry is all that engages this bar, but soon it transpires that the symmetry is far more intricate and largely implies 034 collections (ex.14). The music loses its intensity within a bar, again thanks to the manipulation of texture and volume alone. A last mention of 034 in the way it was first presented, a rising chord appears before section A comes to a close.

The cello rising figure of 015 has appeared before as part of the violin line (bars2-3), but here it is presented as a unit. Its most assertive appearances here and in bar 14 in the second violin confine the second section of the movement.

As with the first section, this comprises of three episodes. The first is a discreet combination of various harmonic blocks. The violin initially restates 034 and then goes through an 012 decoration onto an 015 conclusion to the phrase. This second composite segment (012+015) will signify the end of the movement later. For now, it functions as an expansive elaboration of the opening of the phrase. Underneath this, the two middle parts form an accompaniment pattern that expands and contracts giving direction and intention to the line. (ex.15)

footnote in this analysis, as it is virtually impossible to hear these many and complex relationships in such a rapid passage; and that remains so regardless of the familiarity one obtains with the music.

As before, a canon follows, bringing together many collections that have so far appeared in isolation. The first entry by the cello and the second by the second violin are identical with the first canon entry of the movement (T3 and on the fifth T10).

Then the canon transforms; the third entry starts with a “false” statement and then starts again a major second higher. Moreover, it converts its second half by turning the third tone of the 023 collection into a first tone of a whole-tone cell. The first violin follows immediately in imitation of this new canonic model. The result this has is not at once apparent, but it is here, more than anywhere in the movement, that we can detect the origins of the opening gestures; a rearrangement of the first violin canonic line clearly indicate an 034 set and a minor 6th rise (ex.16).³¹ With this transformation of the counter-subject into its “antagonist” subject, the movement attains complete motivic unity.

This unity is further denoted in the following episode, which is a further assertion of correspondence between 023, 034 and whole-tone sets and of the co-existence of canon and the melody+accompaniment texture. (ex.17) The violin leads this episode by uttering a phrase which shifts from unclouded versions of 023 (bar 12) to whole-tone (bar 13) back to 023 (bar 14). The accompanying voices unfold in canon: first goes the second violin, then the cello. A modification is notable here in the cello rise in its second half preparing the ground for what is to happen in bars 13,14; the viola enters on the last for notes, the cello again on the last four, and the second violin on the last two: a minor sixth. (choice of contour again) The viola then replies with another 04 and the second violin concludes the second section with the 015 gesture (T4).

The final section commences with the return to the idea of a steady bass pattern. It is appropriately an 034 figure that the cello stays on, until the unison phrase of the finale. The middle parts join in the ostinato rhythm with an 023 pattern each at first, then with an

³¹ What is meant here is that the composer is likely to have used the relationships of bar 11 in order to compose this movement. This argument contradicts the more inconclusive approach so far followed, by virtue of strong belief that it is right. It is most probable, for instance, that the opening bars derive from this

034 and an 015. When the melody shifts from 023 to whole-tone, the accompaniment parts initially remain on a 023 collection and then switch to whole-tone. At the end the melody returns to a 023 figuration over a 046 accompaniment. All possible permutations ($2!=4$) have occurred in these four bars. All this is superimposed on the 034 of the bass. The main cells used in the rest of the movement have been presented from bar 15 to bar 21 very clearly and distinctly (ex.18). This clarity is then followed by a coma and the last unison statement, an 034 joined by the final descending declaration, which first appeared in bars 9-10. The “tonic” C# confirms the decisiveness of the previous remark and ends the movement.

A rough diagrammatical outline of the more important cells and the more prominent relationships of both movements follows.

SOME OTHER ISSUES CONCERNING THE ANALYSIS OF MOVEMENTS II AND III OF WEBERN'S OP.5

Later Webern compositions, show a very close relationship between pitch height organisation and the choices concerning other parameters such as duration, timbre and volume. It is interesting to monitor how he deals with these parameters in this earlier work and detect any structural uses of them.

It was seen how, at least in some cases, rhythm is used structurally and how it grows from metric manipulation to portrayal of musical meaning. In a macro-structural sense the same applies to tempo markings, for they frame the musical meaning, thus they shape and crystallise it independently.

But dynamics, timbre and articulation pose a far more perplexing question. A consistent schematic formula should be noticeable if dynamics were used according to design and not as complementary to melodic and harmonic motion. It seems unlikely that this is the case at least in the two pieces analysed above. What is immediately discernible is that

understanding of collection relationships than vice versa simply because it is easier to deduce a subset from a set rather than invent relationships from independently and arbitrarily conceived sets with such clarity.

primary melodic elements are marked with higher dynamic markings than secondary ones.³² Similarly articulation and timbre variation seem to serve one purpose, that of punctuation and division of material into more distinct cells. There is no arithmetical method that defines the articulation of a passage.

Why is then Webern's text so detailed and full of instructions even at points that need no punctuation? What is the purpose of every single phrase being accompanied by a set of hairpins? This music must not be taken out of its historical context, if we wish to examine this issue. This music, being uninformed of the later total serialism Webern is made of subjective decisions which do not originate from a matrix and they do not correspond to other decisions. Yet, we can already see the emergence of timbre as a structural element. The sheer number of articulation markings in such brief music, makes the aural experiment one not based on hearing notes played in a certain manner, but one based on hearing primarily a manner of notes played. It is then hard to refuse that in these works we can trace and already listen to the Webern of op.21 (or op.20) and beyond. And to go back to the shift that this music attempts for its historical environment, it need only be remembered how uniform dynamic range and articulation tended to be in chamber music in 1909.

One other thought concerns the spelling of the text. Enharmonic spelling is of vital importance in late romantic music. Naturally, enharmonic variance hints at intonation practice; especially in string music where there is more than theoretical significance to spelling. Webern, being a cellist certainly had this in mind when composing string music.

What seems to be the general approach in this piece, is to spell intervals rather than spell phrases. In this way spelling may indicate the grouping of notes in a phrase, or even more important structural truths about the piece. The intricacy of this subject is enormous; possibly so enormous that a comprehensive study of it in the context of this pieces could lead to trivial labour. Yet, it is of some merit to make a few surface observations and to alert the reader of the score to recognise spelling as a musical element and not as a graphic device.

³² In effect, what Schoenberg would simply indicate by *Hauptstimme*.

Webern is consistent in spelling intervals correctly³³ almost without fail. Nevertheless, because of the nature of the music there are some doubtful moments. Take for example bar 7 of the third movement. The last note of the first violin ought to be an A# not a Bb. A succession of major thirds and minor seconds is disturbed by this spelling and –if mildly- questions the collection’s “integrity”. When this happens, and it happens a few times in op.5, an immediate and reasonable reaction is to presume that it happens for the sake of practicality. On second thoughts, this seems to be rather absurd. Why should a player find the spelling in the second violin, bar 11 easier to perform than the version which employs an A# instead of a Bb for the third note? It is very hard to give an answer; many possible answers may be given, amongst them that Webern did not spell according to a plan, or that he was often less than meticulous, or that there is some scheme but it is intuitive. None seems to satisfy the question; here Webern simply wants Bb to become more central.

Regardless of these erroneous hermeneutic attempts, for the time, it is of more use to point out the nature of the riddle rather than attempt to solve it.

The whole-tone scale in itself poses the problem of spelling, in the sense that the octave cannot really contain 6 tone intervals without enharmonic variance (ex.19). Similarly, collections and their transpositions may only treat their enharmonics as their exact equals, not as alter-ego tones that may refer to key relationships.³⁴

To conclude this paragraph, it is worth noting that however obscure this matter may seem at first, it actually portrays the rejection of the Western tonal system more than the absence of cadence points, or the lack of a greater dramatic structure. For in the spelling of the text, one may witness the dissolution or growth of a language as a mechanism; and

³³ By correctly is meant, in the tonal tradition. When two sixths appear and share a structural role they both come as sixths, not one as a double-diminished seventh and the other as a sixth.

³⁴ Exactly because they are seen as symmetrical or other formations of tones drawn from 12 (and only 12) equidistant frequencies. This limitation of tone is not inherent in the spelling of tonal music, where intonation practice affects interval relationships. Another important issue which is of interest in conjunction with spelling is the manner of voicing, which will be briefly discussed in the third part.

if anything was directly transformed in the music of this period, that was the grammar and the syntax of the language, not its expressive and semantic dimensions.

Finally, another point needs to be made, to conclude with the analysis of the music. What was barely discussed in the second part was the actual choice of pitch height at which sets of notes appeared. In this music, where actual tone becomes more important than scale degree, and where interval becomes an independent entity and frees itself from function, the appearance of motifs at a specific register is structurally significant.

If the music is seen as a continuum then horizontal relationships between distinct blocks of sound become more visible and for that matter audible. In the fourth bar of the third movement, for instance the high D sets the canon in motion. The choice of the D is not arbitrary; it remains a focal aural point until bar 9 because of the C# and the octatonic collection the latter forms with 023.

The sequence of events in bars 7 to 10 of the second movement is for that matter striking. We spoke of the relationship of sets in this polyphonic passage, but it was not mentioned why the specific transpositions occurred. The violin entry in bar 7 starts on A. That not only ensures an initial whole-tone shade, but also that its answering component forms another 023 with the second violin. Again, the next motif, the major third is comfortably stated on A forming another WTa collection with the ostinato figure. The ensuing answer, which is given as a tonal response to a dominant, forms another symmetry with the ostinato and also acts as dominant to the next entry. This next entry is in turn an altered inversion of the minor sixth (03 inversion) and leads to a vertical formation of 023 again followed by an answer on 023 (ex.20). In this, the more unmistakably coherent of the sections of the two movements, the unity of motivic development manifests a smooth flow, which may eventually be to account for the euphonious nature of the harmony of the piece, notwithstanding its complexity.

Besides all that has been discussed, the sensation remains that not all the relationships that the score governs have been uncovered and understood. Indeed, the more relationships emerge, the less seems to have been understood. In the case of these two pieces, a point of intimacy has been reached that seems adequate. Illogical and inflated as this may sound, it seems to this writer that this may be a permanent condition of musical observation and analysis: to understand less and less by knowing more, until one knows enough and no longer wishes to understand; then musical experience can ensue.

PART THREE

Conclusion:

A few thoughts inherited from Webern's op.5 string quartet

In the course of analysing this music, especially when using the aid of recordings and a piano, a series of indirectly related issues have come to the foreground. For a composer, one of the practical advantages that analysis grants him, is the ability to comprehend the work of past composers so that new music may be based on following, transforming or replacing already established principles. Ridding one of ignorance of past achievements is, historically, a commendable way to stimulate one's creative powers. Parthenogenesis, it is agreed, is only a myth. It is, therefore, paradoxical then that a piece of music, which provokes such thoughts, comes from a particularly interesting time in the history of Western music, when much concerning the past was challenged and when many interpreted this challenge as a complete rejection of the past.

Webern himself was a very able commentator on the Western musical tradition, clearly showing in his writings a very thorough and studied understanding of the Classics. Indeed it is not illogical, even if partly based on subjective evaluation, to claim that his musical consciousness was classical in that he was concerned with timeless musical issues and not with stylistic, symptomatic commercial side-effects. Webern was in that way an artist thrilled by the ancient notion of music as natural Law, as something which is discovered, not invented. And what I propose to put forward in these concluding paragraphs is an impulsive reaction, a series of speculations lacking in orthodox musicological basis, which formed while listening to the opus 5 string pieces and reading *The Path to the New Music*. The fact that an opinion is of controversial scholarly merit does not mean that it may not be interesting and valuable to the reader; such an opinion is then to conclude this essay. Hence the designation of this chapter as a commentary as it ought not to disturb the consistency of the main analytical body, but to be a detached, objective set of views on it.

It was in particular the second chapter of *The Path to the New Music*, that made this section necessary. In this, Webern, discusses the very essence of the musical language and to a degree its autonomy. When, forced by the subject itself, he decides to explain the historical progression in Western music making, Webern encounters the issue of

overtones and quite simply states: "ever subtler differentiations can be imagined, and from this point of view there's nothing against attempts at quarter-tone music and the like; the only question is whether the present time is yet ripe for them".³⁵ The "present time" then being 1933 of course.

But it is not the potential merit of microtonal music that is to be discussed here. It is in fact the microtonal acoustic properties, hinted at in the music of Webern and others of his contemporaries, which are of immense interest. In the music of Webern, one can discern how the arithmetical, symmetrical or logical manipulation of intervals or larger melodic and harmonic cells may be made in such a way that the acoustical logic of traditional music is not abandoned but enhanced. In the whole of the op.5 for instance, the smallest interval in the cello is a major third. This happens only once; for the better part, the bass employs spacious voicing and the treble often engages seconds and minor seconds. In this very simple observation, a conventional acoustic sensibility may be discerned in the correspondence between the voicing of the natural harmonic series and the voicing principles followed here and in Western music generally. To what extent this manner was conscious, unconscious or subconscious may not be known. What is certain is that this is a manner which may be heard in all of this composer's music³⁶ and perhaps more easily in his early atonal compositions.

But there are more questions surrounding this basic issue. It is axiomatically agreed that on hearing a note played by a musical instrument, part of the series of overtones³⁷ is also heard as a result of simple acoustic law, sympathetic vibration. This synthesis of sound is quite subtle and, in a tonal context, limited to a specific degree of dissonance; or as Webern would put it "to a certain degree up the scale of overtones". A perfect fifth sounds as a synthesis of two composite frequencies whereby the overtones of the one and those of the other are consonant, that is they are close together in the "scale of overtones", the ratios of their frequencies tend to be simple, comprising single digit numbers. On the other hand, chromatic, close intervals such as those found in the music of the Second

³⁵ *The Path to the New Music*, p.15

³⁶ Even in later works, where this principle is abandoned, the sensibility and sensitivity remains.

³⁷ This varies depending on physical instrument properties.

Viennese or Bartók and Stravinsky tend to have a much more complex colour, because their natural overtones clash - they are far from each other in the "scale of overtones" and often absent from the fundamental tones of the equal-temperament chromatic scale.

Which brings us to the most extravagant of speculations: Could it be that what provoked the end of tonal music, was not, as is commonly thought, the set of limitations posed by a syntax within which a note is central and more prominent than others, but the fact that overtone "chromaticism", colouring in the literal sense of the word, became gradually more restricted with the advent of more uniform temperaments?³⁸ There is no conclusion to be reached here, but one feels that since a complicated question arises, there must be an equally intriguing and complex answer to be found.

All that being said and no conclusion reached, it is ultimately the work of the theorist, not the scholar, to answer the above question and prove it as either worthwhile or based on erroneous assumptions, but only after conducting "experiments" in examining frequency relationships and the mathematics of sound in atonal music. For what may seem symmetrical, in a diagram like those used in this analysis often sounds oblique and vice versa. After all, sounds are frequencies and the mathematics of frequencies go far beyond the simplicities of two-axis arithmetics. Certainly this writer is, for the time, restricted to the arithmetics and aesthetics of music composition, thus unable to follow these arguments any further. It would seem, however, a shame if this issue, the issue of complex overtone pitch-height relationships and the development of musical style, were to remain the footnote that it has been for so long in musical writings. Particularly so, as this could be one of the fundamental reasons why human consciousness cannot fully attain the autonomy and expressed abstraction that Webern and so many other composers have felt music ideally entails.

³⁸ A lot has been written for and against such speculations, turning the subject into a contest between the 'high priests of microtonality' and the 'orthodox, undisputed scholars of temperament'. Surprisingly, neither side seems to be able to offer a satisfying answer although most opinions exude high levels of confidence and assertion is attempted in abundance.