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Kenneth L. Hicken. *Aspects of Harmony in Schoenberg's Six Little Piano Pieces, Op. 19*. Winnipeg: Frye Publishing, 1984, X, 79 pp.

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## REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

KENNETH L. HICKEN. *Aspects of Harmony in Schoenberg's Six Little Piano Pieces, Op. 19*. Winnipeg: Frye Publishing, 1984, x, 79 pp.

Not long after the disconcerting discovery that Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositions owed, after all, a good deal to tradition, came a surge of interest in the composer's pre-serial atonal period, now considered as having produced the more novel, boldly anti-traditional music: perhaps even the truly revolutionary music of our century. Theorists like Allen Forte and Jan Maegaard developed formidably formalistic methods of analysis to deal with a body of works so seemingly free of the past as to defy conventional approaches. Yet now, with Kenneth Hicken's study of the Opus 19 piano pieces, the tables have been turned once again, for the essence of Hicken's argument is that Schoenberg's harmony, appearances aside, represents an outgrowth of traditional practice, and should be understood in relation to it. We do not, of course, see that practice re-emerging *in toto*, but rather transformed through the abandonment of some of its features, the retention of others, and the substantial modification and extension of yet others. Consequently, in explaining the music, we need only adapt the terms of reference and analytic methods that have already been established as appropriate for the study of tonal music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The book is divided into five chapters, with statistical tables appended. In the first the author justifies his approach in light of Schoenberg's own professed allegiance to tradition, and gives us a preliminary survey of his findings. Among the most important are (1) that all the pieces except the second are organized around a succession of tonal centers, modulating from one to the next through a polyphonic texture made up of strands suggested by these centers, and (2) that the work's harmonic vocabulary can be reduced to basic tertian structures, which often appear richly embellished or even changed beyond recognition (thus quartal chords are treated as being essentially re-arrangements of tertian progenitors). Other traditional features, such as conjunct voice leading, root function, and occasional resolution of dissonance, are also noted. The second chapter provides a classification (with appropriate symbols) of the vocabulary, and gives samples of modulation and chord-to-chord movement. By now the reader is well enough equipped to handle the succeeding chapter's analyses of each of the pieces in turn. The fourth chapter then reveals underlying relationships which "extend well below the surface of the music" (p. 39), such as the unfolding of a Schenkerian chordal *Ursatz*, or the tracing of patterns in the succession of tonal centers "which clearly refer to a traditional mode or scale, which outline or suggest traditional tertian

chords, and which imply traditional harmonic movement" (pp. 46-47). If such relationships are not immediately evident to the ear, it is only because, as the concluding chapter tells us, Schoenberg's tonal and modal system functions in the music's background. Here Hicken cites, in support of his own position, Hans Keller's notion of buried tonality in Schoenberg, building a "reservoir of expectations"; when rising to the surface, these are "meaningfully contradicted" (p. 70). Eternal frustration?

This reviewer is disenchanted with the intellectual gymnastics of much musical analysis today, which gives about as much attention to the historical context of its subject as Jane Fonda's get-fit exercises do to the ordinary gestures of the human body. He therefore welcomes Hicken's study as a determined attempt to restore Schoenberg's atonal music to its proper time and place. The author has clearly reflected long and hard on his subject (readers of the 1980 issue of this Review will recall his preliminary study of Opus 19), and has provided, in straightforward prose and an attractive format, important insights on aspects of harmony in Schoenberg that could otherwise be all too easily overlooked for not being novel or sensational enough to warrant attention.

There are, however, some weak spots in the argument. One of the most troublesome problems arises from the author's obligation to his hypothesis, which results in such a drastic modification of harmonic concepts as to threaten a loss of any real substance. The idea of quartal harmony (not to mention its expressive intent) just about disappears when it is reduced to its supposed origin in the tertian system, as does the idea of modulation when (as "phrase modulation") it is described as taking place through "an abrupt change of tonal center at the commencement of a new phrase, without necessary recourse to a pivot chord or common tone from the preceding phrase" (p. 25). Modulation must somehow survive everything that denies it. No less shadowy is the meaning of the term "tonal center" when, for instance, Hicken finds no less than six such "centers" in the nine measures of the third piece! To be sure, the harmonic language of Schoenberg's predecessors (Wagner in particular) relied heavily already on the transitory nature of centers inferred but quickly contradicted, and remained for all that tonal. Yet the question of *degree* and *rate* of change becomes very much more acute in Schoenberg and cannot simply be evaded. There are certainly patterns in the succession of centers to which one would wish to attribute significance; the author does so by positing each such pattern as a kind of structural *cantus firmus*, not readily audible but guiding the music along in any case. To justify such a pattern melodically, however, is not the same as to confer on it an unambiguous harmonic function.

An equally questionable procedure is to consider harmony, not as a system of interacting functions (each being indispensable to the

whole), but as an aggregate of separable elements which, as such, can survive the loss of a number of them. Thus Hicken does not believe that the disappearance, from Opus 19, of cadential functions necessarily undermines the work's harmonic integrity, nor does he even mention, at any point, the organization of metric and rhythmic stresses which, in traditional tonal music, are essential in supporting and articulating the harmony, and which may now, in Schoenberg's music, be absent or much changed. In sum, the case made in the book for a coherent harmonic structure leaves too much out of account to be entirely convincing, were it to have to stand up against the more modest claim that traditional harmony remains in Opus 19 as a significant trace, but no longer functions as an agent that, in itself, determines the form.

Such problems aside, the book is a valuable one in showing to what extent Schoenberg's musical background was still operative, willy-nilly, at some level of his creative consciousness, and in suggesting sensible ways of testing the new against the old. What the reader will not find anywhere is a sense of the music's subversiveness, or any indication of the questions over which the composer must have agonized as he groped his way, just before World War I, beyond the security of established formulas.

Alan Lessem

THE CHROMA FOUNDATION. *Chromatic Notation: The Results and Conclusions of the International Enquiry*. Victoria, B.C.: Edition Chroma, 1983, 47 pp.

The need for notational reform has impressed itself on composers, performers, and theoreticians with increasing urgency in this century as new methods of musical organization and attendant personal notation systems proliferate and challenge the assumptions that underly our traditional system. In an effort to bring some order to this calligraphic chaos and to evaluate the many contributions to the field, with the goal of creating a new notation for today's music that will exist side by side with the traditional system, the Chroma Foundation in 1979 organized an international enquiry into the notation situation. After receiving "more than 100 notation proposals, of which quite a few have been in use for decades by teachers and composers" (p. 4), the Foundation has now published its findings in order "to bring the problems of music notation a step closer to solution" and to place "[its] efforts at the disposal of an international discussion". (ibid.). In this slender volume, however, one is more often aware of an evasion of important issues and is little inspired to believe that a new system is at all closer to anything approaching universal acceptance.