

# JOURNAL OF *Music*

RESEARCH ONLINE

A JOURNAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

## 'WHERE POWERS ARE BOLDLY STIRRING, I COUNSEL OPEN WAR': ARNOLD SCHOENBERG AND MUSIC CRITICISM

ALEXANDER CARPENTER

Fine Arts and Humanities  
University of Alberta  
Augustana Campus  
4901-46 Avenue  
Camrose, Alberta  
Canada T4V 2R3

[alexander.carpenter@ualberta.ca](mailto:alexander.carpenter@ualberta.ca)

JMRO

[www.jmro.org.au](http://www.jmro.org.au)



THE UNIVERSITY  
of ADELAIDE  
[www.adelaide.edu.au](http://www.adelaide.edu.au)

It is commonplace to contemplate Arnold Schoenberg, the putative father of modern music, as the subject of music criticism, much of it staunchly negative. It is well-known that Schoenberg's entire biography is coloured by his oppositional orientation towards music critics and criticism: indeed, the title of this article comes from Schoenberg's ([1909b/1975](#)) bellicose essay, 'About Music Criticism', in which he damns those Viennese critics who prejudge music and who even disrupt or seek to have performances stopped before a work can have a fair hearing. Over the course of his professional life, Schoenberg responded to critics and criticism in a number of different ways. First, he fired back, writing letters and essays defending his music but also challenging not only the credentials of critics but the very institution of music criticism itself. Second, he painted, literally painted, music critics in rather unflattering terms, representing on canvas what he considered their worst qualities in a series of amateur expressionistic paintings from the early part of the twentieth century. And third, he withdrew himself and the modern music he championed into the Society for Private Musical Performance. Most importantly, Schoenberg also penned what I would consider his own music criticism: offering prescriptions for performance and interpretation, proposing a process for journalistic music criticism, musing on musical aesthetics generally and writing critical essays on the significance of specific composers. This paper argues that, because music historiography situates Schoenberg almost exclusively as the subject of criticism, and because his writings on music were not published or otherwise known or in wide circulation during the crucial years in which he was especially vexed by music critics and the very institution of music criticism, from the fin-de-siècle to the First World War, his contributions to the critical discourse on music in the early twentieth century are overlooked.

### Music Criticism in Vienna

Schoenberg came of age in Europe's musical city, which was, along with its legacy of composers and rich concert life, also the birthplace of Musikwissenschaft and a hotbed for music journalism and criticism. Vienna was, with its robust, nearly year-long concert season, flourishing opera, propensity for pomp and large class of local and visiting musicians of all stripes, an ideal city for music criticism: it 'offered plenty of choice for the music critic', for whom there was an 'overwhelming amount and variety



of music' — Vienna was 'believed by its residents to be the centre of the musical universe' (McColl 1996: 33). As Benjamin Korstvedt notes, Viennese music criticism at that time, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was 'a literary genre in its own right': widely accessible, widely read and very influential, appearing primarily as feuilletons in the daily press rather than in specialised journals, and thereby feeding the 'growing Viennese taste for sensationalism' (Korstvedt 2011: 169–70). The Viennese music critic and musicologist Max Graf similarly asserts the importance of the feuilleton and argues that Viennese criticism, while very serious, was distinct from German music criticism by dint of its literary qualities:

Unlike the Germans, the Viennese would not tolerate dry and pedantic learning ... They even preferred a quite unprincipled cynicism spiced with literary charm to the utmost learning without any literary grace ... Vienna loved to play (Graf 1981: 274–5)

The journalist Karl Kraus, perhaps the keenest observer of and most influential commentator on Viennese culture in the early part of the twentieth century, was highly critical of the nature of journalistic criticism and of the influence of Viennese music journalists, essentially characterising them as small-minded bullies who used their platform and power to attack (often already marginal) contemporary composers. For Kraus, these journalists exemplified the negative socio-cultural impact of a critical press that, in modern parlance, made itself the news instead of reporting it. Kraus described the Viennese press as 'the event', rather than a messenger or a servant, writing that, '[o]nce again the instrument has run away with us. We have placed the person who ... ought doubtless to play the most subordinate role in the State, in power over the world ... over fact and over our fantasy' (as cited in Korstvedt 2011: 174). This touches on Kraus' other objection to journalistic criticism, music criticism, in this case, namely that it came between audiences and the experience of the thing itself: words became a substitute for experience, and the press was, in essence, selling the subjective opinions of its critics as a commodity to readers, in lieu of meaningful reportage and discussion of real experiences (Korstvedt 2011: 174). This Krausian objection, as discussed below, was echoed by Schoenberg who complained loudly about critics, self-absorbed 'expert judges' whose primary concerns were 'show[ing] off' and 'display[ing] themselves in a better light' (Schoenberg 1930/1975: 97), and their careless deployment of words and judgements that alienated him from appreciation by a wider audience.

Concert music in fin-de-siècle Vienna, as Korstvedt argues:

was the object of intense cultural energy, much of which ... focused on critical, closely held points of difference central to the self-identity of the Viennese bourgeoisie in the final decades of the nineteenth century (Korstvedt 2011:160).

Schoenberg became a target of critics for a number of reasons, but in no small part due to his challenges to this bourgeois identity through a dialectical approach, discussed below, to the aesthetic polemic at the heart of critical discourse in the fin-de-siècle Viennese press.

## Schoenberg and His Critics

'I thoroughly detest criticism and have only contempt for anyone who finds the slightest fault with anything I publish', Schoenberg wrote to the music historian and critic Paul Stefan in 1923. These are the words of an artist 'who has been critically flayed and left with no skin at all to cover his nerve ends', as the American composer and critic Virgil Thomson (1965) observed. While Schoenberg's music changed radically from the crisis period of 1908–1912 to the advent of dodecaphony in the early 1920s, to the mature 12-tone and tonal works of the end of his life, Schoenberg remained a popular target of music critics and harbored resolutely negative feelings about critics and criticism, even as his career and the nature of the criticism evolved. A quarter of a century after his letter to Paul Stefan, cited above, when Schoenberg accepted an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1947, just a few years before his death, he famously thanked his enemies, music critics and journalists, who, in attacking him for fifty years for his 'unintelligible ideas' and 'unharmonious torture', spurred him on as a composer and encouraged him to swim 'against the tide' in the 'ocean of boiling water into which they had cast him' (Schoenberg 1947).<sup>1</sup>

While Schoenberg spent much of his time and energy throughout his career asserting the evolutionary necessity of his music and bemoaning the lack of understanding he regularly faced, it is also true that he hoped for public success, and that he did not blame



audiences for the often-poor reception his work received. Rather, he blamed the interpreters of his work, music critics especially, for coming between himself and the listening public who might have otherwise given his music a fair chance: it was 'not the public who hissed' in Vienna at early performances of his works, but rather '... a small but active "expert" minority. The public's behavior is either friendly or indifferent, unless they are intimidated because their spiritual leaders are protesting' (Schoenberg 1930/1975: 97)<sup>2</sup>.

Schoenberg's music is well known as a locus of antagonistic reception and negative criticism: the all-too-familiar Viennese 'scandal concerts', at which supporters and dissenters, as well as critics, some of whom were themselves instigators at these riotous concerts (Neff 2004: 64)<sup>3</sup>, openly fought over modern music, are emblematic of this antagonism, as is the harsh treatment of Schoenberg generally in the European musical press in the early part of the twentieth century. When writing on the early critical reception of Schoenberg's music, the majority of these Viennese critics, at least up to the start of the First World War, did not like Schoenberg's music, as Esteban Buch (2006: 15) has observed. However, they did not respond to Schoenberg and his music as 'simplement mauvais' [simply bad] but rather were incited to launch 'grandes tirades indignées' [grand indignant tirades] against the composer: 'Ainsi, même les plus hostiles à son œuvre étaient prêts à lui reconnaître un statut exceptionnel, fût-il celui d'être exceptionnellement mauvais' [even the most hostile to his work were ready to give him an exceptional, felicitous status, that of being exceptionally bad] (Buch 2004: 21).

Viennese critics were already deeply ideologically entrenched by the time Schoenberg appeared on the scene at the end of the nineteenth century. This entrenchment was related in part to the Brahms-Wagner polemic, and in particular to the staunch anti-Wagnerism of the critic, Eduard Hanslick, and his followers. Korstvedt has documented the effects of this polemic on Anton Bruckner, and has linked it to broader concerns of social identity of the Viennese bourgeoisie: Brahms' music was taken to 'epitomize ... high bourgeois rationality', tradition and historicism; the Wagnerians, by contrast (which included Bruckner and Hugo Wolf) were characterised negatively as progressive and irrational (Korstvedt 2011: 179). While the splits between Brahms-Wagner or Brahms-Bruckner are not always easily or clearly mapped out according to clear-cut political positions, the aesthetic divide that was engendered in the Viennese critical press was certainly problematic for Schoenberg, especially since he approached the issue dialectically, presenting his compositional aesthetic as predicated on a blend of Wagnerian and Brahmsian elements. As Karnes has noted, Schoenberg 'confounded the attempts of critics and philosophers to formulate an abstract view of the creative process along the lines of the conscious/unconscious paradigm of creativity described by countless nineteenth-century writers' (Karnes 2008: 189). David Wyn Jones has argued that these aesthetic polemics (Wagner versus Brahms, rationality versus irrationality, etc.) were largely resolved by the start of the twentieth century, with 'composers like Schoenberg and Zemlinsky readily embracing both trajectories, interacting with both rather than regarding them as mutually exclusive' (Jones 2016: 182). Sandra McColl disagrees, however, observing that, while Schoenberg himself could claim that by 1897 the 'impassible gulf' of Wagner versus Brahms was 'no longer a problem', anti-Wagner critics were still active in Vienna up to 1897, and that the Brahms-Wagner polemic had been transmuted into the Brahms-Bruckner polemic. The 'impassible gulf' may have no longer existed but there were still critics who arranged themselves on one side or the other of 'the Brahms-Wagner fence' as the turn of the century approached (McColl 1996: 108–10 *passim*). Moreover, the city that became the birthplace of modern music was by no means unequivocally amenable to the advent of atonality as an acceptable dialectical synthesis of competing aesthetic positions, or as the natural or evolutionary outcome of the German tradition, as Schoenberg and his followers would have it. Indeed, as Theodore Adorno declared, Schoenberg's music comprised, from the outset, a 'heroic ... resistance to the musical roast-chicken culture' of Vienna, a city that 'has made a natural monopoly of musicality that once and for all absolves people from any effort. In this world modern music has always had a hard time' (Adorno 1992: 201–2). According to Adorno, this antagonistic response to modern music, and to Schoenberg in particular, was a vital part of Viennese society and culture:

[Vienna's] social structure, half feudal, half dependent on trade and luxury goods, was as unfavorable to abrasive intellectual innovations as was the climate of Viennese psychology...Viennese culture permeated the whole of life like ether and although it was secretly in conflict with everything culture really stands for, it had consolidated itself as the status quo, as the tacit affirmation of the existing state of affairs. For this very reason, it was inevitable that the greatest talents would rise up against it and prove to culture that it was insufficiently cultured (Adorno 1992: 202–3).

In such a milieu, it seems that Schoenberg was predestined to come into conflict with the establishment critics of the press<sup>4</sup>.



Many of the earliest reports on Schoenberg's music from German critics in Berlin are already conclusive, and condemn Schoenberg's music as 'extreme' and 'cacophonous': 'Schoenberg ist der extremsten einer; die Kakophonien sind hier zum Gesetz erhoben ... Es gibt aber auch eine Aesthetik des Hässlichen' [Schoenberg is one of the extremists; here cacophony is elevated to a law ... After all, there is an aesthetics of the hideous] (as cited in [Slonimsky 2000: 148](#)). The Viennese critics, notably Ludwig Karpath, a long-standing antagonist of Schoenberg's, also called the composer's music cacophonous. He accused it of being filled with 'Missklängen' [wrong notes] (as cited in [Slonimsky 2000: 148](#)) and asserted that he experienced physical pain in the concert hall when listening to Schoenberg: 'trotz aller guten Absicht selbst das Schlimmste zu überwinden, nun doch aufschreien musste' [despite all good intentions to endure even the worst, I still had to cry out] (as cited in [Slonimsky 2000: 148–9](#)). Another of Schoenberg's enemies, Hans Liebstöckl, the music and theatre critic for the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, and the *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*, insisted that the composer's music lacked 'human qualities', and was 'bitter and tasteless ... horrifying' (as cited in [Neff 2004: 75](#)). Paul Stauber, critic for *Montagspresse*, published a feuilleton on 30 January 1905 after a performance of *Pelleas und Melisande*, claiming that Schoenberg's music constituted a direct assault on music: 'Es ist das stärkste Stück, welches in letzter Zeit wider die Musik ausgespielt wurde' [It is the strongest piece performed against music in recent times] ([Stauber 1905](#)). Stauber is also the critic famously reputed to have loudly requested that the Bösendorfer-Saal in the Musikverein be ventilated after the premiere of Schoenberg's Op. 10 string quartet, before a Beethoven quartet could be performed: 'Jetzt kommt der Beethoven, lassen Sie den Saal lüften!' [Now comes the Beethoven: air out the hall!] (as cited in [Eybl 2004: 225](#)).

Of course, it must be acknowledged that not all of Schoenberg's music of the early twentieth century was vilified by music critics. The notable exception is the monumental *Gurre-Lieder* song cycle, composed in 1900–1901 but not fully orchestrated until 1911. The work, with its massive orchestral and choral forces, received its premiere in February of 1913 in Vienna's Musikverein. The audience response was overwhelmingly positive and included a lengthy ovation, which a churlish Schoenberg pointedly did not acknowledge. For Schoenberg, as of 1913, *Gurre-Lieder* was already rather dated, and represented for him the summation of a bygone era and aesthetic, namely late Romanticism. While he acknowledged that the public and critical success of *Gurre-Lieder* was a boon, noting that it helped promote the notion he was 'sincere' rather than an incompetent charlatan, and it encouraged listeners to be more open to his later works ([Campbell 2000: 34](#)), Schoenberg nonetheless remained irritated with audiences and critics alike. As he recollected in 1937:

As usual, after this tremendous success [of *Gurre-Lieder*], I was asked whether I was happy. But I was not. I was rather indifferent, if not even a little angry. I foresaw that this success would have no influence on the fate of my later works. I had, during these thirteen years, developed my style in such a manner that to the ordinary concertgoer, it would seem to bear no relation to all preceding music. I had had to fight for every new work; I had been offended in the most outrageous manner by criticism; I had lost friends and I had completely lost any belief in the judgement of friends. And I stood alone against a world of enemies ([Schoenberg 1937/1975: 41](#))

Some critics, in the immediate wake of *Gurre-Lieder*, offered a gentler, even mildly abashed response to Schoenberg's music. However, the composer's assessment that the success of his song cycle would have no lasting effect on the future was correct: just a few weeks after the *Gurre-Lieder* premiere, in March of 1913, Schoenberg, Berg and Webern would endure the infamous 'Skandalkonzert', in which critics and audience members rioted in protest against the modern music of the Second Viennese School. This took place in the same building that had just hosted Schoenberg's acclaimed song cycle.

As we have seen, music criticism in Vienna in the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century was not merely insular, focusing primarily on Viennese performances and Viennese composers, but was also, as an endeavour that was born and evolved in the vein of the feuilleton, sharply polemical and partisan and driven especially by scandal and sensationalism ([Korstvedt 2011: 170](#))<sup>5</sup>. Schoenberg's shifting status as a Wagnerian, and then a Brahmsian, then as a locus of residual hatred for Mahler, then as the vanguard of modern music, was obviously ready grist for the critics' mill. McColl wryly observes that, given the prevailing attitudes among music critics at the turn of the century, who were already railing against Puccini's parallel fifths and Humperdink's anodyne experiments in Sprech-gesang, it is little wonder that 'Vienna's community of music critics was not quite ready for Schoenberg' ([McColl 1996: 217](#)).

Leon Botstein has described the negative critical response to Schoenberg in Vienna as centered upon the notion that the composer was merely an 'enfant terrible' determined to intentionally outrage the public and that his music was not just formless, amelodic and mechanistic but also reflective of a mentally unhealthy society ([Botstein 1999: 39](#)). This opprobrium evolved into an intra-ethnic





debate between Schoenberg as a representative of modernist Jewish music, and Vienna's many Jewish music critics: for these critics, Schoenberg's music presented a political conundrum and the attack on his music was rooted in part in concerns that the largely Jewish concertgoing audience in Vienna was anxious about its own socio-cultural status and therefore insecure about its own taste and capacity for judgement ([Botstein 1999: 39–40](#)). Postbellum criticism of Schoenberg, especially in the 1920s, took on a decisively anti-Semitic tone, insisting that Schoenberg's music was either calculated to manipulate and deceive gullible audiences, merely playing a sort of intellectual game, or located Schoenberg at the heart of a generalised modernist crisis in European culture, accusing him of the destruction of tradition ([Botstein 1999: 41–2](#)). It was the hostile criticism of the Viennese press that, as Buch has argued, definitively situated Schoenberg's music as 'revolutionary', as representing a historical 'rupture' ([Buch 2006: 14](#))<sup>6</sup>

## Responding to the Critics: In Kind

In 1912, Schoenberg engaged in an infamous polemic with the critic Leopold Schmidt, after the latter submitted a negative review of a concert of Schoenberg's music to the *Berliner Tageblatt*. This was just one of several negative reviews, but Schoenberg took particular offence to Schmidt's critique because he had heard that Schmidt only attended a portion of the concert but nonetheless published a comprehensive and damning review ([Bailey 1980: 119](#)). Schoenberg, in his brief retort to Schmidt's review, accused Schmidt of having missed some of the performance, invoking the term 'Schlafwandler' [sleepwalker] to characterise the disingenuous critic, of being negatively predisposed to Schoenberg himself, and of practicing bad criticism as a consequence ([Schoenberg 1912b/1975](#)). The controversial exchange between Schoenberg and Schmidt, in which the critic defends a particular aesthetic position and the composer identifies what he regards as the proper goals of music criticism, 'obvious[ly] ... stemmed from issues much larger than this single concert' as Walter Bailey ([1980: 119](#)) has observed.

Given the importance Schmidt placed on art pleasing the masses, and his assessment of much modern music as divorced from tradition, eccentric and often merely modish, it was inevitable that he and Schoenberg should clash. In his review, Schmidt characterised Schoenberg as 'very talented' but assessed his music as going off in 'strange directions, resulting in an originality that is very cheap': he pointedly dismissed Schoenberg's *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* [Book of the Hanging Garden], Op. 15 songs as inexpressive, 'boring and lacking in creativity' and concluded that such music need not be fought against since 'it kills itself' (as cited in [Bailey 1980: 124](#)). For his part, Schoenberg considered Schmidt to embody the worst and most typical sort of music critic, namely, the failed musician (notwithstanding Schmidt's training as a music historian and composer) or worse, one of the 'emergency mood critics' who rose up in the wake of Wagner and subsequently formed a 'closed block' of would-be experts ([Schoenberg 1909b/1975: 192–3](#)). Schoenberg fundamentally disagreed with Schmidt's aesthetic position, which was garishly festooned with 'the ornaments of "artistic theory" and predicated upon judging contemporary music in accordance with standards and tastes of the masterworks of the past' (as cited in [Bailey 1980: 128](#)). Schoenberg's view of the ideal qualifications of a critic echoes those of Schumann and Liszt: a critic should be a musician who is fully literate and technically competent, rather than a mere dilettante. Schoenberg would surely have been sympathetic to Schumann's insistence that 'true criticism can only come from creative minds' (as cited in [Bannard 1924: 269](#)) but perhaps at the same time, given Schoenberg's sometimes contradictory and paradoxical nature, to Bannard's claim with respect to composer-critics: 'Criticism and creation are opposite processes — the one largely of analysis, the other of synthesis. It would seem the man possessing the power to construct is rarely able to analyse' ([Bannard 1924: 269](#)).

Schmidt was not really a dilettante but Schoenberg vilified him as such: Viennese music criticism, even in the regular newspapers where it was typically found, often included technical and detailed discussion of the music itself. However, it nonetheless remained populist, rhetorical and frequently sensationalist in character, and was aimed at entertaining a growing lay audience of concertgoers rather than for musicians as such ([Korstvedt 2011: 171](#)). Schoenberg counterattacked Schmidt in an article in the journal *Pan* and, as noted above, labeled the critic a 'sleepwalker' at the concert because his review mentioned a work that had been struck from the program and because he mistook the identity of one of the pianists. Schmidt, Schoenberg wittily asserted, must have been present at the concert in spirit only, while his body, including his eyes and ears, slept at home. This is perhaps a tacit indictment of the prejudiced feuilletonist style of Viennese criticism: unqualified critics without ears reviewing concerts, as Schoenberg experienced it. It may also be an echo of Karl Kraus' vociferous disdain for journalistic criticism that substitutes words and opinions for real experience, as described above. Indeed, Kraus' attack on the bourgeois press directly indicts critics like Schmidt, or Schmidt's colleague and Schoenberg antagonist Karpath,



whom Kraus is reputed to have particularly disliked ([McColl 1996: 5](#)), who seem to embody his concerns about critics who abuse their power and who exemplify his complaint about the press, namely that ‘the instrument has run away with us’. Schmidt replied to Schoenberg in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, defending his review and calling out the composer as a hypocrite, presumably because Schoenberg attacked Schmidt personally rather than challenging the substance of his criticism. Within days, Schoenberg penned a second rejoinder, which appeared once again in *Pan*. This long article, ‘Der Musikkritiker’, reasserts Schoenberg’s accusation that Schmidt was not present for the entire concert, characterises him as ‘helpless’, for not being able to cope with the simple and relevant details of a concert program, and incompetent, for failing to grasp the importance of both these small details and the larger issues at stake (as cited in [Bailey 1980: 136](#)). Here, finally, Schoenberg clarifies what I take to be his main concern with music criticism and critics, namely, ‘the nonchalance with which critics play with lives, even when they have recognized [as Schmidt had done some years earlier] that they will have to take an artist seriously’ (as cited in [Bailey 1980: 137](#)). In the end, Schoenberg is irritated with Schmidt because he considers the task of the journalistic music critic to be ‘ludicrously easy and insignificant’ (as cited in [Bailey 1980: 137](#)). Why, Schoenberg asks, can’t critics simply do their jobs? And how can they justify being so unforgiving to those they criticise while not always remaining above criticism themselves?

In early 1909, Schoenberg also penned an open letter to Ludwig Karpath, who had offered to establish his qualifications as a critic and justify his negative review of Schoenberg’s Op. 10 string quartet (which appeared in *Der Signale* in early January 1909) by taking an examination on ‘harmony, form, and all other music disciplines’ (as cited in [Auner 2003: 62](#)). Schoenberg’s letter was published in *Die Fackel* in February of 1909, and included a preface by Kraus, in which he goaded Karpath to take the exam (but to no avail). Around this same time, Schoenberg wrote directly to Kraus to share with him his views on music critics, insisting that Viennese music critics were ‘of such incompetence and ignorance that one can evaluate them only on the basis of the extent or lack of the damage they cause’ (as cited in [Auner 2003: 60](#)). This, according to Schoenberg, is how the critics themselves understand their jobs: ‘producing advertising for a popular artist or stirring up opinion against an unpopular one’ (as cited in [Auner 2003: 61](#)).

## Responding to the Critics: On Canvas

Another of Schoenberg’s responses to his critics was to paint them. As Esther da Costa Meyer observes, Schoenberg, ‘whose animosity toward music critics was proverbial, channelled his anger into several caricatures, executed with burlesque, hyperbolic traits’ ([da Costa Meyer 2003: 55](#)). Schoenberg was an amateur artist, though with serious aspirations, and seems to have taken up painting sometime in 1906. The bulk of his paintings, emerging from bouts of intense creative activity, were completed between 1907–1912, though it is difficult to date them accurately ([Adams 1995: 6](#)). Schoenberg is reputed to have taken some informal lessons from the young painter, Richard Gerstl, in 1906 but, as Adams observes, Schoenberg (as was true of his brief informal musical studies with Alexander Zemlinsky) ‘was able to assimilate basic concepts without adopting the mannerisms or styles of his mentors’ ([Adams 1995: 7](#)). Schoenberg’s oeuvre of paintings and drawings includes portraits, a collection of more abstract representations of heads and faces he called ‘Visions’ and ‘Gazes’, and representations of realistic, natural scenes. He developed a friendship with the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky, who celebrated Schoenberg as both a musician and artist. Kandinsky lauded Schoenberg’s paintings, and in particular the Visions and Gazes, which Schoenberg himself especially valued as ‘stirrings of the soul’ and ‘the painting of essence’, and helped to organise exhibitions of the composer’s work ([Kandinsky 1912/2014](#)).

Schoenberg painted three particularly important representations of critics or would-be connoisseurs of art: expressionistic caricatures of an arts patron, entitled *Kunstmäzen*, and of two critics, entitled *Kritiker I* and *Kritiker II*. *Kunstmäzen*, painted sometime before October of 1910<sup>7</sup>, is a relatively anodyne depiction and includes only the round head and fat face of the patron, resting at the very bottom of the picture as though it had sunk there of its own weight. Above the patron are earthy oranges and reds, blending into a crest of brown hair. He appears to have a thick brown mustache, from which his tongue seems to be protruding giving rather the striking effect of a dog’s snout. This effect is intensified by the fact that the patron, like one of the critics described below, seems to be missing sensory organs that are key to his role, namely, his eyes.

Schoenberg’s *Kritiker I* and *Kritiker II* strike a different tone from *Kunstmäzen*. The dating for these two paintings is uncertain, but they were likely completed in 1909 or 1910<sup>8</sup>, during Schoenberg’s crisis period (a period in which, it should be noted, Schoenberg was



engaging directly with both critics and with the institution and practice of music criticism: three of his most substantial essays on music criticism date from 1909). Of the two caricatures, *Kritiker I* is most often reproduced, and is the more interesting of the two.

*Kritiker II* is striking in its use of colour, and in its rather unflattering representation of the critic's brutish face in profile: a receded chin, a large head, a mop of curly hair, a protuberant nose, beady eyes and what appear to be heavy jowls. Most telling about *Kritiker II* is the absence of ears, the most important perceptual apparatus of a music critic. In the absence of ears, however, such a critic could still readily fulfill his profession's role as Schoenberg characterises it: the shameless promoter of popular composers and boorish inciter of negative attitudes towards modern composers of Schoenberg's kind.

Both of these paintings demonstrate, according to da Costa Meyer, 'violence not only in the overdrawn features, but in the very mode of production — the abrupt brushwork and dissonant colors' (da Costa Meyer 2003: 55). Presumably, these paintings serve as a repository not only of Schoenberg's overflowing creative urges, as they are often characterised, but also his animosity towards music critics and the institution of criticism. While the earless *Kritiker II* is a compelling portrait, it is the true grotesqueness of *Kritiker I* that captures both Schoenberg's attitude and the viewer's attention. *Kritiker I*, in sharp contrast to *Kritiker II*, has enormous ears: they are distorted and oversized, even bat-like, with huge, gaping, red-rimmed black holes and pointy red tips, perhaps hinting that the subject is a demonic, or even vampiric figure. Like *Kritiker II*, *Kritiker I* also has a weak, indeed absent, chin, presumably subsumed into his long beard. The head of *Kritiker I* is squared off at the top, with a low forehead, but overall the shape is like a triangle, coming to a point at the base of the beard. Like the *Kunstmäzen*, his eyes are empty sockets, and he is smiling inanely: his lips, like his ears, are over-stretched, the corners of his mouth red and extending upwards above his nose. *Kritiker I*, to my eyes, hints vaguely at the style of Schoenberg's contemporary, the Expressionist painter Egon Schiele, particularly Schiele's use of daubs of bold colours, reds and oranges, on highly important anatomical features, such as the eyes, nipples and genitals.

The overall effect of the grotesque and monstrous visage of *Kritiker I* is visceral and complex. The figure of the music critic is here represented, on the one hand, as possessing the necessary equipment for his job, namely huge ears, and Schoenberg explicitly attributes 'organs as sensitive as the music's absolute pitch and formal sense' to the post-Wagnerian lay critics who were able to 'submit to those elemental impressions released by music, the language of the subconscious' (Schoenberg 1909b/1975: 192). On the other hand, this critic is clearly a decidedly unwholesome character, a malevolent and perhaps even supernatural figure who does not so much hear as consume music through his cavernous earholes. This caricature is, according to Severine Neff, a composite of Ludwig Karpath and Hans Liebstockl, Schoenberg's chief antagonists among the Viennese critics (Neff 2004: 69–70). What is more, the notion of the critic as a kind of inhuman or subhuman character is affirmed by Neff, who suggests that the appearance of *Kritiker I* references the satyr-god Pan (Neff 2004: 69). Neff has also remarked on the figure's resemblance to the beastly Äfflinge, or apelings, subhuman characters found in circulation in early twentieth century Viennese journals concerned with racial purity and the cult of the Aryan, notably Adolf Josef Lanz' *Ostara*, and also in the writings of Swedish modernist August Strindberg (Schoenberg's personal library contained Strindberg's collected works) (Neff, 2004, 70–1; Johnston 1972: 331). Schoenberg makes reference to Liebstockl's 'nightmarish appearance' and invokes Strindberg's Äfflinge (evil, satyr-like beings of a lower class who delight in manipulation and control, and in tormenting and attacking good white men for their virtues (as cited in Neff 2004: 71)) in his 1909 essay, 'A Legal Question'. In it he mocks his critics (Stauber and Karpath, and especially Liebstockl) for being both intellectually deficient and physically repulsive: Liebstockl, in Schoenberg's words, is 'a nightmare become flesh and beard' (Schoenberg 1909a: 186).

The English translation of Schoenberg's essay by Leo Black in *Style and Idea* substitutes the word 'upstarts' for Äfflinge in the original German, obscuring some of the racial nuances of Schoenberg's invocation of this creature in association with his critics. Neff has asked whether Schoenberg recognised the implications of using this word, especially given its anti-Semitic associations, and specifically whether Schoenberg was simply characterising his critics as evil subhuman beasts, or whether he was cognisant of the term's darker meanings and may have been responding to what he perceived as Liebstockl's anti-Semitism by giving him the grotesque, subhuman Jewish features of an apeling in turn (see Neff 2004: 70–1). Whatever the case, Schoenberg's paintings of his critics clearly reflect the composer's desire to go beyond the printed page and engage viscerally and directly with individual critics and, through grotesque caricature, to challenge and mock the broader institution of journalistic criticism in Vienna.



As previously noted, Schoenberg is often described as having turned to painting as a supplemental channel for his over-abundant creativity. However, as discussed below, it is important to note that soon after he began painting Schoenberg also considered journalistic writing as another possible outlet. In the case of both painting and writing, Schoenberg, I would argue, seems to have been catalysed by critics and by the problem of criticism.

## Schoenberg as Critic

Schoenberg's creativity was animated by a 'forceful spirit', in the words of one of Schoenberg's students, the composer Karl Linke, that 'moved freely among all artistic media, expressing its "emotions, ideas, and other feelings" in a single artistic vision' (as cited in [Neff 2004: 63](#)). Linke was speaking of Schoenberg's forceful spirit as it manifested itself in music, poetry and painting, but Neff's invocation of 'all artistic media', above, surely embraces Schoenberg's voluminous prose writings, and especially his efforts that could be said to fall within the realm of music criticism. I would argue that, just as the criticism of the Viennese critics extended beyond the printed word, to outbursts in concerts and organising the disruption of performances, so Schoenberg's engagement with critics similarly spilled over into his paintings, but also his prose.

Schoenberg was a prolific writer. In addition to published works on music theory, his writings include a vast array of published but mostly unpublished essays, aphorisms, notes, commentaries and memoranda on a variety of subjects, from musical composition, history and theory to aesthetics, politics, religion, and philosophy<sup>9</sup>. Much of Schoenberg's writing on music could be classified as music criticism, insofar as it is concerned with the practitioners of criticism and the institution of music criticism itself, or is focused on issues relating to analysis, interpretation, value and judgement. Schoenberg is, to the best of my knowledge, not normally identified as a critic in the secondary literature devoted to the history of music criticism. Max Graf's book *Composer and Critic*, for example, includes a number of composer-critics, including Schoenberg's contemporaries Claude Debussy and Hugo Wolf, but not Schoenberg himself (even though Schoenberg and Graf were friends) ([Graf 1981](#)). Henry Haskell's well-known and substantial collection of music criticism, *The Attentive Listener: Three Centuries of Music Criticism*, likewise includes many composer-critics, including Schumann, Berlioz, Debussy, Wolf, Paul Dukas and Virgil Thomson but, again, not Schoenberg ([Haskell 1995](#)). Josiah Fisk's voluminous anthology *Composers on Music: Eight Centuries of Writing*, contains excerpts from Schoenberg's letters but includes virtually none of what I would consider his critical writing ([Fisk 1997](#)). The entry for 'Musikkritik' in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* mentions the assault on the Second Viennese School, in relation to criticism in the early twentieth century, but does not mention Schoenberg or his contributions to the literature of music criticism ([Wicke 1997](#)); and the *Grove Music* entry for 'Criticism', which similarly includes the composer-critics Schumann, Berlioz, Liszt, Debussy and Wolf among others, does mention in passing Schoenberg's essay, 'Brahms the Progressive', as part of the critical discourse of early modernism, but mainly as part of the context of early twentieth century debates over the issue of musical progress ([Maus et al. 2001](#)). The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* entry for 'Criticism' includes some of the composer-critics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also in the *Grove* entry, but does not mention Schoenberg ([Randal 2006](#)). The same is true of *The Oxford Dictionary of Music* ([Kennedy 2013](#)). English monographs on Vienna and music criticism likewise focus on academic and journalistic critics, with Schoenberg appearing, again, as the target of critics and not anything like a critic himself. This includes Sandra McColl's 1996 monograph, *Music Criticism in Vienna 1896–1897: Critically Moving Forms*, which mentions Schoenberg fewer than half a dozen times and never as a critic. Kevin Karnes' 2008 book on music criticism in late nineteenth century Vienna, *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History: Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth Century Vienna*, focuses on major figures in the history of Austrian music criticism, primarily Hanslick, Guido Adler and Heinrich Schenker. Karnes mentions Schoenberg several times in passing, but, even though some of his critical essays are cited, Schoenberg appears in the study as a creative artist and not as a contributor to the discourse of music criticism ([Karnes 2008: 189](#))<sup>10</sup>.

Schoenberg had sought support in his early battles with music critics from Karl Kraus, and submitted an essay, really an enraged screed, against music critics in 1909, in addition to the open letter to Karpath that is discussed above. Kraus published Schoenberg's letter but not the essay, and the composer, while acknowledging that perhaps his talents lay elsewhere, nonetheless expressed a desire to wield a pen and participate directly in the culture of criticism in Vienna. As he wrote to Kraus, 'I should be delighted if I could ... push a satirical pen ... Lucky the man who has something to say. But luckier the man who can say it so sharply that one either believes it or cuts oneself





on it' (as cited in [Reich 1981: 38](#)). This is a somewhat marginal but nonetheless striking comment, and I think that it is valid to link this impulse 'to push a pen' to Schoenberg's other extra-musical creative impulses and to the notion that Schoenberg's creative mind actively sought expression through a variety of media.

Some of Schoenberg's most substantial writing concerning the nature and craft of music criticism is found in his essays, 'About Music Criticism', 'An Artistic Impression', and 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Music'. 'About Music Criticism' was published in October of 1909 in the Viennese musical periodical *Der Merker*; 'An Artistic Impression' is an unpublished essay that was written in the same year and 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Music' is an unpublished lecture originating as draft in 1927 ('Kriterien musikalischen Werte') and later revised and given as a lecture in English in 1946 (editor's notes, [Schoenberg 1946/1975: 518](#)). These three texts not only document Schoenberg's abiding engagement with and bitterness towards music criticism and critics but also and importantly articulate a kind of methodology for criticism, touching upon how music criticism should ideally work.

Schoenberg, I would argue, regards criticism as a potentially dialogical process, a term that Schoenberg never used but that acknowledges and grapples with the multivalence and contingencies of artistic communication. The concept of the dialogic comes from Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, whose theoretical work opposes the dialogic to the monologic in artistic communication (in literary works in Bakhtin's case and in music, for the purposes of this paper) and, by extension, critical engagement. The dialogic implies an ongoing dialogue between other works and author-composers, in which the meaning of any and every 'utterance', also a Bakhtinian theoretical term, describing any kind of expression in a communicative exchange, is informed dynamically by a nebula of other utterances, past, present and future, creating a kind of intertextual web ([Bakhtin 1981](#)). As the political theorist Andrew Robinson observes:

A dialogical work constantly engages with and is informed by other works and voices, and seeks to alter or inform it. It draws on the history of past use and meanings associated with each word, phrase or genre. Everything is said in response to other statements and in anticipation of future statements... The dialogical word is always in an intense relationship with another's word, being addressed to a listener and anticipating a response. Because it is designed to produce a response, it has a combative quality (e.g. parody or polemic). It resists closure or unambiguous expression, and fails to produce a 'whole'. It is a consciousness lived constantly on the borders of other consciousnesses ([Robinson 2011](#)).

In the first two texts, 'About Music Criticism' and 'An Artistic Impression', Schoenberg describes an approach that ideally begins with the reception of 'artistic impressions', which he characterises as a phenomenon comprised of two parts: what the work of art gives to the receiver and what the receiver gives to the work of art ([Schoenberg 1909a/1975: 189](#)). An artistic impression is 'a product of the listener's imagination', but the imagination is also 'released by the work of art, but only if one has available receiving apparatus' (cited in [Reich 1981: 38](#))<sup>11</sup>. Impressions may be converted to artistic judgements through a kind of self-analysis, a knowledge and awareness of one's own 'unconscious feelings'; artistic judgements can then be turned into value judgements by comparing them with each other. The critic then filters these artistic judgements through training, education and one's own nature towards gaining insight and perspective on a particular work. The entire process is underwritten by what Schoenberg ([1909b/1975](#)) describes as critic's 'sense of the past and an intuition of the future' ([Schoenberg 1909b/1975: 194–5 passim](#)). I think this tacit critical methodology, as suggested above, can be fruitfully understood via the lens of Bakhtinian theory and the concept of the dialogic, which Debora Haynes notes is 'epistemological: [o]nly through it do we know ourselves', entering, via art, 'a dialogue with perception and shar[ing] knowledge about the world' ([Haynes 2002: 297](#)). Bakhtin also invokes the concept of polyphony in this context, a musical term he uses as a metaphor in his study of Dostoyevsky and referring to what Robinson describes as the 'unmerged' multi-voicedness of a literary text ([Robinson 2011](#)). But this could also be a useful way to understand an approach to music criticism that seems to insist on the simultaneity of a number of different voices, all speaking at once and contributing to the act of assessment and judgement: the imagination, the unconscious, the work itself, and works from the past and the future.

Schoenberg's would-be critical methodology, as I have characterised it, also presents a clear answer to Kraus' complaints about the feuilletonists of the Viennese press, insofar as Schoenberg is advocating a form of music criticism that focuses on and seeks to recreate and contextualise the event as filtered through the critic's experience and knowledge. The critic is an expert, but recognises himself as situated in time relative to the object of criticism and is simultaneously engaged in a process of self-evaluation as he constructs his judgements.



## Schoenberg, Criticism and the ‘Beckmessers of today’

Since sense experiences are filtered through the critic's sensory and intellectual apparatus and then processed into judgements, Schoenberg seems to advocate a staunchly objective position as a critic that is predicated upon holding on to standpoints and limitations while at the same time his advocacy is for an expert musician-critic whose experiences are largely subjective. In his 1912 essay on Gustav Mahler, Schoenberg invokes Wagner's Beckmesser, from *Die Meistersinger*, satirising his contemporaries, and clearly critics, who consider themselves modern or even ultramodern and who are abreast of all of the current trends in art and all of the critical clichés ([Schoenberg 1912a/1975: 453](#)). These people should be able to ‘establish in advance the very problems and methods with which the art of the immediate future will have to concern itself’ ([Schoenberg 1912a/1975: 453](#)). Schoenberg goes on to insist that this ‘is the unexpected result which Wagner attained when he created Beckmesser as a warning for too-hasty critics’ ([Schoenberg 1912a/1975: 453](#)). What does Schoenberg mean here? Beckmesser serves as a warning in that he exemplifies the critic who may find flaws in the work of art, but who is at least attending to rules (even if they are outmoded). For Schoenberg, it is the new Beckmessers who profess to be broadminded who are the problem, softening their judgements so as to appear as connoisseurs of the new. For Schoenberg, broad-minded is really soft-minded:

... the Beckmessers of today affirm that they have become ‘broad-minded’. But this is obviously false, for the good is and remains good and must therefore be persecuted, and the bad is and remains bad and must therefore be promoted. Thus the praised broadening of the mind appears to be rather a softening of the brain. For these men have lost every standpoint and all limitations, since they do not notice that they are even more narrow-minded than those who at least praised what ‘ran according to their rules’ ([Schoenberg 1912a/1975: 453](#)).

Interestingly, Beckmesser appears several times in Schoenberg's writings on music criticism. In 1909, Beckmesser is invoked, in passing, as a warning to disingenuous, ignorant and unqualified critics who present themselves as authorities, those critics whose ‘calling had been to the remotest fields of reporting’ but now found themselves ‘the chosen ones of art. If a court reporter had once been a choirboy, that was enough qualification to review music’ ([Schoenberg 1909b/1975: 193](#)). Such critics, who fancy themselves masters and authorities, are really parasites, deriving their insights from third parties: ‘One was lectured’, Schoenberg railed, ‘as if Beckmesser had never existed’ ([Schoenberg 1909b/1975: 193](#)).

Beckmesser appears yet again in Schoenberg's ‘Criteria for the Evaluation of Music’ ([1946/1975](#)) in a similar context. Schoenberg clearly continues to be occupied with the problem of music criticism, decades after his conflicts with critics in antebellum Vienna, arguing in this essay for the importance of expert evaluators, whose education compels them to assess, among other things, dissonance, texture, structure, style, the presentation of ideas, the appropriateness of material to medium, and whether a work demonstrates originality, creativity and necessity ([Schoenberg 1946/1975: 134](#)). Schoenberg notes that not all music warrants this kind of technical assessment and evaluation: popular music, while sometimes creative and original, does not intend to ‘strengthen the mind’ in the same way classical music does, and technical knowledge of music is not required to form evaluations; ‘probably instinct serves as a judge. Certainly a well-functioning instinct can offer a basis for correct judgement’ ([Schoenberg 1946/1975: 134–5](#)). Beckmesser appears in this essay as an example of an expert judge and indeed it is widely thought that Wagner intended for Beckmesser to represent Eduard Hanslick<sup>12</sup>, who exemplifies, again, the dangers of criticism. While Beckmesser is clearly an expert, a critic who knows all the rules, he commits the cardinal sin of criticism, namely that he fails in the application of his knowledge to “‘what does not with your rules agree” ... And when Hans Sachs confides more in those who “know naught of the tabulature”’, Schoenberg concludes, ‘his confidence is well placed’ ([Schoenberg 1946/1975: 136](#)).

Schoenberg concludes this essay with a turn from rules and subjective judgements to the metaphysical, the spiritual, and the political. He observes that music has a certain universality insofar as it ‘conveys a prophetic message revealing a higher form of life towards which mankind evolves’, that loving music and being ‘sensitive to its charms’ does not make one a good judge of its value, nor can we simply defer to authority, since experts make mistakes and the passing of time alters perceptions and understanding. However, intuitive amateurs can also have critical insights that are as correct as the fruits of expert knowledge ([Schoenberg 1946/1975: 136](#)). This is a rather striking turn towards an apparently ambivalent position about music criticism but I would argue that it is firmly in line with what Schoenberg



insisted upon in his earliest writings on the subject, namely that critics need to strike a difficult balance between formalistic knowledge of music, the ability to perceive and understand its technical qualities, and imaginative engagement with music on a metaphysical and psychological level. Ultimately, Schoenberg's ideal critic is what I would call a critic of the extraordinary: that is, for Schoenberg, ordinary music (popular music or regressive art music) does not even warrant critical engagement while criticism, as a serious pursuit, should be reserved for music that is, to use his word, 'prophetic', that conveys quasi-spiritual messages from the realm of ideas to receptive, critical listeners and evaluators

## Engagement and Disengagement

A final and important aspect of Schoenberg's engagement with music critics and criticism took the form of a strategic withdrawal, leading to the formation of the Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen [Society for Private Musical Performance] in 1918. This withdrawal paradoxically constitutes a kind of critical engagement in its own right insofar as it recognises and reinforces Schoenberg's fundamental view of Viennese critics, namely that they are either destroyers or propagandists, and not faithful, expert commentators and assessors of music and musical performance. The Prospectus for Schoenberg's Society, drafted by Alban Berg, insists that attendees of performances given by the Society must 'abstain from giving any public report of the performances ... and especially to write or inspire no criticisms, notices or discussions of them in periodicals' (cited in [Auner 2003: 152](#)).

The formation of the Society for Private Musical Performance serves as an explicit indictment of Vienna's music criticism establishment, denying its legitimacy and affirming its role as an arm of the conservative cultural institutions of the city. By excluding critics from the Society's performances, Schoenberg was affirming in 1918–1919 the same views he held during his crisis years of the early atonal period a decade earlier, at a time when he himself would like to have published his views on music in Vienna's musical press: critics are 'unfit to be even cannon-fodder in the battles of art' ([Schoenberg 1909b/1975: 194](#))

## Conclusion

In spite of Schoenberg's often negative and reactionary actions and attitudes, it is true to say that Schoenberg took music criticism very seriously. It presented a tacit philosophical conundrum for him, posing ontological and epistemological questions about music, art, perception, subjectivity, and meaning. Even though Schoenberg did not write and publish reviews or other types of traditional journalistic criticism, his lifelong engagement with the problems of music criticism, in addition to his voluminous writings on composers, musical aesthetics, music history and performance arguable qualify him for inclusion in the ranks the most important critics of the early twentieth century.

One way to understand Schoenberg as a critic is as future-oriented. Certainly, two of his major essays that best demonstrate his acumen as a music critic, 'Brahms the Progressive' ([Schoenberg 1947/1975](#)) and 'Liszt's Work and Being' ([Schoenberg 1911/1975](#)), focus on analysing and interpreting both composers' music as forward-looking. In the former essay, Schoenberg argues that Brahms is as harmonically adventurous as Wagner, and that Brahms advanced musical language and formal unity through uncompromising logic and long-range relationships. Liszt, in Schoenberg's account, was a formalist, a composer who failed to follow his insights and expressive needs but nonetheless led a significant charge against tonality and tradition. Schoenberg attributes value where there is progress, where composers like Brahms, for instance, can be understood as visionary.

But, I would also like to suggest that, as a critic, Schoenberg is in fact negotiating the space between past and future, advocating a process for music criticism that is dialectic and, as described above, dialogic in a Bakhtinian sense: in tension and in communication with multiple works, with meaning and interpretation being dependent upon understanding how a work informs and is informed by tradition and by other works. What is wrong with most critics, Schoenberg argues, is their failure to see and hold the future in balance with the past. Instead, they judge the new on the terms of the old or merely celebrate the new to bolster their own reputations as broad-minded: what Bakhtin would certainly regard as a kind of authoritarian and monologic approach to critical discourse.



Of course, Schoenberg's complaints relate directly to his own experiences with critics and, in this regard, we can say that Schoenberg's music criticism is, like much of his music and many of his paintings, about himself. In his conception of music criticism (in which the critic mediates between audience and the work via sensory perceptions, has an awareness of the placement of the work in time and in relation to other works, and does the work of criticism filtered through education, experience and probing psychological self-analysis) he could easily serve as his own model critic.

In typical form, Schoenberg is contradictory and ambivalent about music criticism. This makes the whole project of examining Schoenberg and criticism frustrating, but also intriguing. Schoenberg was tempted to take up the pen himself as a critic, as we know, but also had nothing but contempt, even before his head-on collision with establishment critics like Karpath, Liebstöckl and Schmidt, for those he called 'the dogs of the press,' as he wrote to Arnold Rosé in February of 1907 (cited in [Haimo and Feißt 2016: 379](#)). Music criticism, as Schoenberg viewed it, was such lowly work, beneath even a mere piano or voice teacher, that you really had to hit rock bottom before you took it up ([Schoenberg 1909b/1975: 193](#)). Yet, as he acknowledges, it also involves the very important activities of registering artistic impressions, filtering them through one's own nature, and engaging one's intellectual and analytical faculties towards making a value judgement. Music critics are incompetent and can destroy a composer's life but, at the same time, they are important witnesses to history and progress. Schoenberg may have been at war with music critics his entire career, but if so, it was a war in which Schoenberg was an active participant, as a kind of critic himself, and not merely collateral damage in the ideological and aesthetic struggles of nascent musical modernism.

## ENDNOTES

1. The Arnold Schoenberg Center has both a transcript and voice recording of this speech. See <<https://schoenberg.at/index.php/en/component/content/article?id=954:vr01>>
2. It was also the case, however, that Schoenberg did sometimes implicate the public in the same crimes as the critics. In a 1909 interview with Paul Wilhelm, appearing in the *Neues Wiener Journal* ([Wilhelm 1909](#)), Schoenberg asserted that sometimes, neither audiences nor critics can set standards for judgement, because they have been deserted by the spirit of art, they often fail to recognise their own tastes in works they judge negatively:

The public and critics nowadays have so taken leave of their artistic senses that they can in no way serve as a measure. Today one can't even gain self-confidence through a failure. The public and the critics don't recognize their own taste veiled in an artistic form so that they occasionally themselves bring about the failure of a work that should have actually appealed to them. They don't recognize their own intellectual progeny any more (as cited in [Auner 2000: 60](#)).
3. Neff claims that 'prominent critics had joined and even led the riot' at the famous 1908 scandal concert in Vienna in the Bösendorfersaal at the Musikverien ([Neff 2004: 65](#))
4. Sarah Elaine Neil has meticulously documented the critical reception of Schoenberg during his 'crisis years', and argues that:

This early, crucial reception history has been incredibly significant and subversive; the details of the personal and political motivations behind deeply negative or manically positive responses to Schoenberg's music have not been preserved with the same fidelity as the scandalous reactions themselves ([Neil 2014: iv](#))
5. Alban Berg ([1920–1921/2014](#)) identified and railed against this feuilletonist character in a short essay defending Schoenberg against music critics, entitled 'Wiener Musikkritiker'. In his essay, Berg finds that critics are 'frivolous' when discussing 'musical issues', and insists that 'true judgement does not occur in a feuilleton' ([Berg 1920–1921/2014: 177–8](#)).
6. '... c'est la critique hostile qui, la première, perçut l'oeuvre de Schönberg comme une rupture. Pour cette raison, la critique hostile aura contribué de manière décisive à établir le statut révolutionnaire de l'oeuvre d'Arnold Schönberg dans l'histoire de la musique' [it was hostile criticism which, first, perceived Schönberg's work as a rupture. For this reason, hostile criticism has contributed decisively to establishing the revolutionary status of Arnold Schöberg's work in the history of music]
7. See Image 114 at the website of the Arnold Schoenberg Center. <<https://schoenberg.at/index.php/en/schoenberg-2/bildnerischeswerk/karikaturen>>
8. See Images 112 (*Kritiker I*) and 113 (*Kritiker II*) at the website of the Arnold Schoenberg Center. <<https://schoenberg.at/index.php/en/schoenberg-2/bildnerischeswerk/karikaturen>>





9. The Arnold Schoenberg Center in Vienna and the Internationale Schönberg-Gesellschaft are currently preparing a planned 24-volume *Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Schriften Arnold Schönbergs*. <<http://www.schoenberg.at/index.php/de/forschung/gesamtausgaben>>
10. Of course, if we consider Schoenberg a music critic in his own right, it has to be acknowledged here that he was a different sort of critic from those composer-critics whose writing is included in the canon of music criticism. For composer-critics like Debussy and Schumann, who wrote actively and consistently for the popular and musical press, for instance, criticism was a creative and decisively literary activity, for which both men invented personae that allowed them to engage dramatically and often satirically with contemporary music and prevailing attitudes about music and culture. Of the other composer-critics, someone like Hugo Wolf, a contemporary of Schoenberg's, was perhaps less of a philosophical critic but certainly a true journalistic one and an important participant in Vienna's critical discourse, combining what Ernst Newman called 'the genuine critic's gift of seeing general problems in the smallest particular events' with a 'sharp pen ... [that] makes everything live that it describes' (Newman 1912: 506). Admittedly, such composer-critics contrast sharply with Schoenberg, who published very little of the criticism that he wrote and could not be considered an active critic during his lifetime: his contributions to the discourse of music criticism are instead considered synchronically here.
11. Schoenberg's critical process is very nearly a technical one: as his early biographer Willi Reich claims, Schoenberg's remarks about having the correct receiving apparatus, and being appropriately tuned in, are strongly suggestive of nascent radio technology (Reich 1981).
12. Edward Rothstein, music critic for the *New York Times*, observes that Hanslick is reputed to have walked out on an early reading of *Die Meistersinger's* text, presumably recognizing himself in the character of Beckmesser. Rothstein characterizes Beckmesser as a critic whose role is to:

... judge newcomers (like the opera's young aspirant, Walther), who claim nobility and immense musical gifts and wish to be declared Masters of the Art. They act as "Markers" — stern graders slashing chalk across slates — citing every supposedly broken rule, sometimes attacking fellow Markers with similar narrow-mindedness. Beckmesser cannot actually create beauty himself; all he can do is find flaws, judging the new by the old. In an early draft of the text, Beckmesser was called Hanslich, after the powerful critic, Eduard Hanslick, who dared to criticize Wagner. Hanslick was at the composer's 1862 reading of the 'Meistersinger' text; he stormed out in anger (Rothstein 1993)

## REFERENCES

1. Adams, Courtney. 1995. 'Artistic Parallels Between Arnold Schoenberg's Music and Painting (1908-1912)'. *College Music Symposium* 35: 5–21.
2. Adorno, Theodore. 1992. *Quasi una Fantasia*. Rodney Livingstone, transl. London: Verso
3. Auner, Joseph. 2003. *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
4. Bailey, Walter. 1980. 'Composer Versus Critic: The Schoenberg-Schmidt Polemic'. *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 4 (2): 119–37.
5. Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Michael Holquist, ed., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, transl. Austin: University of Texas Press
6. Bannard, Yorke. 1924. 'Composer-Critics'. *Music and Letters* 5 (3): 264–9.
7. Berg, Alban. 1920–21/2014. 'Vienna's Music Criticism: Two Feuilletons'. In *Pro Mundo-Pro Domo: The Writings of Alban Berg*. Bryan Simm, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 177–81.
8. Botstein, Leon. 1999. 'Schoenberg and the Audience: Modernism, Music, and Politics in the Twentieth Century'. In *Schoenberg and His World*. Walter Frisch, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 19–54.
9. Buch, Esteban. 2004. 'Au nom de la Loi : Schoenberg et les critiques'. *Raisons Politiques* 14: 21–40
10. \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *Le cas Schönberg: naissance de l'avant-garde musicale*. Lonrai: Éditions Gallimard.
11. Campbell, Bruce. 2000. 'Gurrelieder and the Fall of the Gods: Schoenberg's Struggle with the Legacy of Wagner'. In *Schoenberg and Words: The Modernist Years*. Charlotte M. Cross and Russell A. Berman, eds. New York: Garland Publishing. 31–64
12. da Costa Meyer, Esther. 2003. 'Schoenberg's Echo: The Composer as Painter'. In *Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and the Blue Rider*. Esther da Costa Meyer and Fred Wasserman, eds. London: Scala Publishers. 37–61.
13. Eybl, Martin, ed. 2004. *Die Befreiung des Augenblicks: Schönbergs Skandalkonzerte 1907 und 1908*. Vienna: Böhlau Verlag
14. Fisk, Josiah, ed. 1997. *Composers on Music: Eight Centuries of Writing*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
15. Graf, Max. 1981. *Composer and Critic*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press
16. Haimo, Ethan and Sabine Feißt, eds. 2016. *Schoenberg's Early Correspondence 1891–1907*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
17. Haskell, Henry, ed. 1995. *The Attentive Listener: Three Centuries of Music Criticism*. London: Faber and Faber.



18. Haynes, Deborah. 2002. 'Bakhtin and the Visual Arts'. In *A Companion to Art Theory*. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde, eds. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 292–302.
19. Johnston, William. 1972. *The Austrian Mind*. Berkeley: University of California Press
20. Jones, David Wyn. 2016. *Music in Vienna: 1700, 1800, 1900*. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press
21. Kandinsky, Wassily. 1912/2014. 'The Paintings'. Arnold Schoenberg Center, Vienna. Accessed 11 May 2019. <<https://www.schoenberg.at/index.php/en/wassily-kandinsky-die-bilder-2>>
22. Karnes, Kevin. 2008. *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History: Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth Century Vienna*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
23. Kennedy, Michael. 2013. 'Criticism, Musical'. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*. Joyce Bourne, ed. Oxford University Press. Accessed 19 May 2018.
24. Korstvedt, Benjamin. 2011. 'Reading Music Criticism Beyond the Fin-de-siècle Paradigm'. *The Musical Quarterly* 94 (1-2): 154–210.
25. Maus, Fred Everett, Glenn Stanley, Katharine Ellis, Leanne Langley, Nigel Scaife, Marcello Conati, Marco Capra, Stuart Campbell, Mark N. Grant, and Edward Rothstein. (2001) 'Criticism'. *Grove Music Online*. Accessed 29 March 2018.
26. McColl, Sandra. 1996. *Music Criticism in Vienna 1896–1897: Critically Moving Forms*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
27. Neff, Severine. 2004. 'Scandal and Painting'. *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Center* 6: 63–75.
28. Neil, Sarah Elaine. 2014. 'The Modernist Kaleidoscope: Schoenberg's Reception History in England, America, Germany, and Austria 1908–1924'. PhD diss., Duke University.
29. Newman, Ernst. 1912. 'Hugo Wolf as Music Critic'. *The Musical Times* 53 (834): 506–8.
30. Randal, Don Michael. 2006. 'Criticism'. In *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Fourth Edition. Edited by Don Michael Randal. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
31. Reich, Willi. 1981. *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography*. Leo Black, transl. New York: Da Capo Press.
32. Robinson, Andrew. 2011. 'In Theory — Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia'. *Ceasefire*. Accessed 1 May 2019. <<https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-1/>>
33. Rothstein, Edward. 1993. 'Beckmesser: Two Villains At a Swipe'. *New York Times* 24 January. Accessed 1 March 2018. <<https://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/24/arts/classical-view-beckmesser-two-villains-at-a-swipe.html>>
34. Schoenberg, Arnold. 1909a/1975. 'A Legal Question'. In *Style and Idea*. Leonard Stein, ed. Leo Black, transl. London: Faber and Faber. 185–9
35. \_\_\_\_\_. 1909b/1975. 'About Music Criticism'. In *Style and Idea*. Leonard Stein, ed. Leo Black, transl. London: Faber and Faber. 191–7.
36. \_\_\_\_\_. 1911/1975. 'Franz Liszt's Work and Being'. In *Style and Idea*. Leonard Stein, ed, Leo Black, transl. London: Faber and Faber. 442–7.
37. \_\_\_\_\_. 1912a/1975. 'Gustav Mahler'. In *Style and Idea*. Leonard Stein, ed, Leo Black, transl. London: Faber and Faber. 449–72.
38. \_\_\_\_\_. 1912b/1975. 'Sleepwalker'. In *Style and Idea*. Leonard Stein, ed., Leo Black, transl. London: Faber and Faber. 197–8
39. \_\_\_\_\_. 1930/1975. 'My Public'. In *Style and Idea*. Leonard Stein, ed., Leo Black, transl. London: Faber and Faber. 96–9.
40. \_\_\_\_\_. 1937/1975. 'How One Becomes Lonely'. In *Style and Idea*. Leonard Stein, ed., Leo Black, transl. London: Faber and Faber. 30–53
41. \_\_\_\_\_. 1946/1975. 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Music'. In *Style and Idea*. Leonard Stein, ed., Leo Black, transl. London: Faber and Faber. 126–36
42. \_\_\_\_\_. 1947. 'To the National Institute of Arts and Letters'. Arnold Schönberg Center. Accessed 1 March 2018. <<http://www.schoenberg.at/index.php/de/archiv/schoenberg-spricht?id=954:vr01>>
43. \_\_\_\_\_. 1947/1975. 'Brahms the Progressive'. In *Style and Idea*. Leonard Stein, ed., Leo Black, transl. London: Faber and Faber. 398–441.
44. Slonimsky, Nicholas. 2000. *Lexicon of Musical Invective*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
45. Stauber, Paul. 1905. 'Feuilleton. Konzerte'. Arnold Schönberg Center. Accessed 5 December 2017. <[http://www.schoenberg.at/scans/Clippings/C19050125\\_d.pdf](http://www.schoenberg.at/scans/Clippings/C19050125_d.pdf)>



46. Thomson, Virgil. 1965. 'How Dead is Arnold Schoenberg?' *New York Review of Books*, 22 April. Accessed 1 February 2018. <<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1965/04/22/how-dead-is-arnold-schoenberg/>>
47. Wicke, Peter. 1997. 'Musikkritik'. In *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Bd. 6. Ludwig Finscher, ed. Kassel: Bärenreiter. 1362–89.
48. Wilhelm, Paul. 1909. 'Paul Wilhelm: Bei Arnold Schönberg'. Arnold Schönberg Center. Accessed 1 March 2018. <<http://www.schoenberg.at/index.php/de/paul-wilhelm-bei-arnold-schoenberg>>.

## ABSTRACT

It is commonplace to situate Schoenberg as the subject of music criticism, much of it staunchly negative. Schoenberg's entire biography is coloured by his oppositional orientation towards music critics and criticism and he frequently blamed the arbiters of his work for coming between himself and what might have otherwise been a more receptive listening public. This article makes a case for Schoenberg as not merely the subject of criticism, but rather, by virtue of his lifelong engagement with critics and criticism, in letters, essays, and on canvas, as a key participant in the discourse of music criticism in the early twentieth century, and as an important music critic in his own right.

**Keywords.** Arnold Schoenberg, Vienna, history of music criticism

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexander Carpenter is Professor of Music at the University of Alberta (Augustana Campus) where he also serves as Chair of the Academic Advisory Board of the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies. He teaches courses in music history, theory, aesthetics, popular music and film music. His research interests include the music of Arnold Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School, the cultural and intellectual history of Vienna, popular music, the connections between music and psychoanalysis, and music criticism.

Received by the editors 2 April 2018; accepted for publication (in revised form) 5 September 2019

© Alexander Carpenter (2019)