

Anton von Webern

AW

Three Piano Works

(Op. posthumous): A Critical Edition
Introductory Essay by Matthew Shafteel

1. Kinderstück
2. Satz für Klavier
3. Rondo für Klavier

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Introductory Essay

by Matthew R. Shafstel

If you want to make something clear to someone, you mustn't forget the main point, the most important thing, and if you bring in something else as an illustration you mustn't wander off into endless irrelevancies.

So the whole thing must hang together; otherwise you are unintelligible.

—Anton Webern, *The Path to the New Music*¹

The term emancipation of the dissonance refers to its comprehensibility, which is considered equivalent to the consonance's comprehensibility. A style based on this premise treats dissonances like consonances and renounces a tonal centre...The first compositions in this new style were written by me around 1908 and, soon afterwards, by my pupils, Anton von Webern and Alban Berg.⁴

Anton Webern's Compositional Style

The complete collection of works that Austrian composer Anton Webern (1883–1945) published during his lifetime fits easily on a single bookshelf, and a complete performance could be heard in less time than a performance of any *one* of the operas in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*—with enough time left over to grab a cup of coffee.² However, the significance of these 31 opus-numbered miniatures (1908–1943) and the man who composed them cannot be measured by their surprising brevity. The intense focus, compact lyricism, and restricted use of materials found in these works influenced several generations of American and European composers, setting the course for the serialists, integral serialists, spectralists, and even the minimalists. Indeed, Anton Webern, perhaps even more than either his mentor Arnold Schoenberg or his friend Alban Berg, defined the principle lines of stylistic evolution for Western art music in the twentieth century. At the time of his death in 1945, Webern was already seen as a central figure in the worldwide art-music community, even though his works remained relatively unknown in his native Austria for some time. In the past 70 years, Webern's opus-numbered works have been the subject of frequent study and performance, including hundreds of individual recordings and over 1,000 books and articles.³

The mature works of Webern, Berg, and Schoenberg established a new “atonal” style of composition, which differed fundamentally from the tonal music of the previous three centuries. In “Composition with Twelve Tones,” Schoenberg writes about this new “style” of music that treats dissonances as stable entities and renounces a tonal center:

Webern's first published works (1908–1924) are based on non-tonal sets of pitches or “cells,” which are presented and developed as motives in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of musical space. The remainder of his published works, starting with his Op. 17 (1924–1925), features the interaction of motivic cells drawn directly from a twelve-note chromatic collection as presented in a particular repeating order that is unique to each work. The children's piano piece in the present collection, *Kinderstück*, was the first composition that Webern completed in the new twelve-tone style (1924), although the composer never pursued the work's publication.

Webern typically balances harmonic constructions with careful consideration of each voice's individuality. In his doctoral thesis on Heinrich Isaac, Webern praised the fifteenth-century Flemish composer's precise control of musical lines:

every voice has its own development and is a complete, wonderfully spirited structure, closed and understandable within itself.⁵

In Webern's works, however, the individual melodic and contrapuntal lines often cross the boundaries of timbre as they are distributed among the various (and unusually combined) tone colors of his ensembles in a technique known as *Klangfarbenmelodie* (tone-color melody). Although the three works in the present edition are all written for a single instrument—piano, the principles of *Klangfarbenmelodie* are readily apparent in the division of the hands in *Kinderstück* (1924), the latest work in this edition, and an intricate contrapuntal foundation is at the core of the two earlier works, *Satz für Klavier* (1905–1906) and *Rondo für Klavier* (1906).

1 Anton Webern, *Der Weg zur neuen Musik*, Willi Reich, ed. (Vienna, 1960). Translated by Leo Black in *The Path to the New Music* (Bryn Mawr, 1963), 18.

2 In 1923, Austrians were forced to drop their patrician titles; thus Anton von Webern became Anton Webern. Although it reappeared on his letterhead in the 1930s and 40s, most current scholarship uses the shorter form. See, for example: Allen Forte, *The Atonal Music of Anton Webern* (New Haven, 1998); Anne Shreffler, *Webern and the Lyric Impulse: Songs and Fragments on Poems of Georg Trakl* (Oxford, 1994).

3 The definitive biography of Anton Webern's life is still Hans Moldenhauer's *Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of his Life and Work* (London, 1978), 101. Moldenhauer's bibliography (pp. 758–773), although out of date, provides a good starting point for any scholar hoping to add to the vast research on Webern's life, music, and legacy. There are two complete recordings of Webern's opus-numbered works, both conducted by Pierre Boulez: *CBS* (1969–1970), and *Deutsche Grammophon* (2000).

4 Arnold Schoenberg, “Composition with Twelve Tones,” (1941). In *Style and Idea*, edited by Leonard Stein (Berkeley, 1975), 214–245.

5 *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich, 16, part 1: Heinrich Isaac: Choralis Constantinus II* (Vienna, 1909), p. viii. Translation in Robert Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music* (New York, 1991), 78.



Manuscript No. 2
 Caption: Sketch of the opening measures of *Satz für Klavier*
 (1905-1906). Reproduced by permission of the Paul Sacher
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Satz für Klavier

(1905–1906)

ANTON von WEBERN (1883–1945)

Edited by Matthew R. Shafiel

Lebhaft

The musical score is written for piano in 2/4 time. It begins with a treble clef and a common time signature. The first measure is marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The piece is characterized by frequent triplets and complex harmonic structures. Measures 5, 8, and 11 are marked with measure numbers. The dynamics range from mezzo-forte (*mf*) to fortissimo (*ff*) and then to pianissimo (*ppp*). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and articulation marks.

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21

Measures 21-24. Treble clef: A melodic line starting on G4, moving up stepwise with some chromaticism, ending on E5. Bass clef: A rhythmic accompaniment of eighth and sixteenth notes, mostly on G3 and A3.

25

Measures 25-28. Treble clef: Continues the melodic line. Bass clef: More active accompaniment with eighth notes and some chords, including a G3 octave pedal point in measure 28.

29

Measures 29-32. Treble clef: Features triplets and sixteenth notes. Bass clef: Steady accompaniment with eighth notes and some chords.

33

Measures 33-36. Treble clef: Features triplets and sixteenth notes. Bass clef: Steady accompaniment with eighth notes and some chords.

37

Measures 37-40. Treble clef: Features triplets and sixteenth notes. Bass clef: Steady accompaniment with eighth notes and some chords.

41

Measures 41-44. Treble clef: Features triplets and sixteenth notes. Bass clef: Steady accompaniment with eighth notes and some chords.

Rondo für Klavier (Sonatensatz)

(c. 1906)

ANTON von WEBERN (1883–1945)

Edited by Matthew R. Shaftel

Sehr Belebt!

pp

8 *p*

15 *cresc.*

22

27 **Ruhig bewegt**

3

3

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32

pp

Red.

36

41

45

8vb

51

ff

Kinderstück

(Autumn, 1924)

ANTON von WEBERN (1883–1945)

Edited by Matthew R. Shafstel

Lieblich

5

9

rit.