

TEMPO

A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF MODERN MUSIC

Edited by Colin Mason

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 51-36700

In his article on page 9, on some performance problems in contemporary music, David Wooldridge is concerned more with the contemporary music of yesterday than of today. To most listeners, for whom *The Rite of Spring* has long ceased to be any problem at all, he may seem somewhat out of touch, but for the performer, whose task is not merely to discover but to reveal, problems are not so easily disposed of, and his physical engagement in execution may actually hinder him from discovering so quickly as the listener the musical message that he is supposed to be transmitting.

Not many composers have adopted the method of indicating 'Hauptstimme' and 'Nebenstimme' by which Schoenberg attempted to help his performers—perhaps because of its implied denial of the self-explanatoriness of the music. This innovation was concerned chiefly with clarification of complex texture, though if its desirability is conceded at all, some might think it equally useful for the extremely attenuated textures of Webern (who did not use such indications). It is also in connection with Webern rather than Schoenberg that Mr. Wooldridge raises the much debated point about the relevance of a grasp of the serial procedure to an understanding of the musical 'meaning'.

Composers seem to have been generally in agreement that the serial construction is no concern of the listener's, but fewer have committed themselves over the performer's needs and obligations in this matter. Today Schoenberg's music can be recognized as so basically 'traditional', however dense, in texture that most musicians could find the musical 'line' by instinct, without going into the series; and now that Webern's style is so much more familiar than twenty years ago the same is probably true (contrary to what Mr. Wooldridge suggests) of his Piano Variations—though in an ensemble work of similar texture (say the String Trio) the performers probably would derive real help from an understanding of the serial structure.

But what about those works where the serial working is as complex and deeply concealed as in the passage in Webern's Op.21 that Mr. Wooldridge describes, where it is hard to see how an awareness of it can be put to practical use in the clarification of phrasing or texture. The reprise-cum-coda to the second movement of Stravinsky's 'Movements', or the coda to the second movement of *A Sermon, a Narrative and a Prayer*, are still more formidable examples, in each of which all four forms of the series are sounded simultaneously, but so 'scrambled' that knowing how they go provides no useful clue to the audible sense. In this particular passage from 'Movements' I have never experienced as a listener that sense of musical concentration and intensity which, knowing how it works serially, and given its formal function, I expect of it. Is this because no performance has adequately conveyed what it should convey, and if so, is this in turn because the conductors have not been adequately aware of its density of serial content? Or is it that my expectations, based on the awareness of its serial content, are wrong? And if the latter, does this not mean that the performer too must seek the musical answer elsewhere?