

V. CONCLUSION

One of the most striking features found in each of the three pieces of Op. 50 is Schoenberg's use of consonant sonorities and areas of pitch emphasis. Ethan Haimo, in his article on Schoenberg's late works, notes his "interest and willingness to make explicit triadic and tonal references, suggesting some kind of reconciliation between serialism and tonality."¹ The argument that Schoenberg was trying to reintroduce consonance and pitch emphasis into his twelve-tone music is supported by the development of his serial technique seen in Op. 50. In each of the works of Op.50, Schoenberg takes a progressively more systematic approach to the inclusion of elements of tonality into his serial style.

In *Dreimal Tausend Jahre*, Op. 50a, Schoenberg's incorporates pitch emphasis in a direct and uncomplicated way through the use of diatonic subsets contained within a single combinatorial pair of row forms, P_0 and I_5 .

Example 5.1
Source Row Forms for *Dreimal Tausend Jahre*

The image displays two musical staves in treble clef, each containing a twelve-tone row. The first staff is labeled P_0 and is identified as G Major. The notes are G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D. The second staff is labeled I_5 and is identified as E Minor. The notes are E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B. Brackets above the first staff group the notes G-A-B and A-B-C. A bracket above the second staff groups the notes E-F-G. The notation uses standard musical symbols for notes, stems, and accidentals.

¹ Haimo, Ethan. "The Late Twelve-tone Compositions" in *The Arnold Schoenberg Companion* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 158.

In *De Profundis*, Op. 50c, pitch emphasis is created by the relationship between the tritone dyads and major third dyads within the source row form. The row for *De Profundis* is all combinatorial, with the result that sixteen different row forms keep these dyads invariant.

Example 5.2
Row Forms used in *De Profundis*

	Hexachord 1						Hexachord 2						
P ₀	E ^b	A	G [#]	E	D	B ^b	G	B	C	F [#]	F	D ^b	R ₀
P ₆	A	E ^b	D	B ^b	G [#]	E	D ^b	F	F [#]	C	B	G	R ₆
I ₀	E ^b	A	B ^b	D	E	G [#]	B	G	F [#]	C	D ^b	F	RI ₀
I ₆	A	E ^b	E	G [#]	B ^b	D	F	D ^b	C	F [#]	G	B	RI ₆
R ₃	E	G [#]	A	E ^b	D	B ^b	D ^b	F	G	B	C	F [#]	P ₃
R ₉	B ^b	D	E ^b	A	G [#]	E	G	B	D ^b	F	F [#]	C	P ₉
RI ₃	G [#]	E	E ^b	A	B ^b	D	B	G	F	D ^b	C	F [#]	I ₃
RI ₉	D	B ^b	A	E ^b	E	G [#]	F	D ^b	B	G	F [#]	C	I ₉

Schoenberg's method of creating pitch emphasis in *Modern Psalm*, Op. 50c, is similar in many ways to the method he used in *De Profundis*. The row for Op. 50c is constructed from (014) trichords, which makes the minor second, the minor third and the major third the most prominent intervals used in the piece. Schoenberg uses the minor seconds present in the row as quasi-leading tones that create area of pitch emphasis that focus on the bottom notes of the third dyads. The source row form for *Modern Psalm*, like that of *De Profundis*, is also

all combinatorial, which allows Schoenberg to make use of twenty-four related row forms where the content of the hexachords remain invariant.

Example 5.3
P₀ Row Form from *Modern Psalm*



Another interesting aspect of pitch emphasis found in Op. 50 is that it occurs in symmetrical patterns. David Lewin notes that Schoenberg had an interest in symmetrically based tonal structures that dates back to *Harmonielehre*, and that this technique of inversive balance can also be seen to affect set relationships in Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositions.² In *Dreimal Tausend Jahre*, the pitch emphasis pattern consists of two perfect fifths separated by a half step, G-C-A^b-E^b. The pattern in *De Profundis* is based around the lower notes of the major third dyads, which form a series of minor thirds, G-B^b-D^b-E. *Modern Psalm* has three axes of symmetry which are each separated by a major third.

In a 1947 letter to René Liebowitz, Schoenberg addressed the issue of incorporating consonances and tonal references into serial music:

Under the term of loosening the 'rigor' of the treatment of the twelve tones you mean probably the occasional doubling of octaves, occurrence of tonal triads and hints of tonalities. Many of the restrictions observable in my first works in this style, and what you call 'pure', derived more theoretically than spontaneously from a probably instinctive desire to bring out sharply the difference of this style with preceding music. [. . . .] As regards hints of a

² Lewin, David. "Inversive Balance as an Organizing Force in Schoenberg's Music and Thought." *Perspectives of New Music* 1968, 6(2): 1-21.

tonality and intermixing of consonant triads one must remember that the main purpose of 12-tone composition is: production of coherence through the use of a unifying succession of tones which should function at least like a motive. Thus the organizational efficiency of the harmony should be replaced. It was not my purpose to write dissonant music, but to include dissonance in a logical manner without reference to the treatment of the classics: because such a treatment is impossible.

Schoenberg seems to be implying that a true “emancipation of dissonance” would allow consonance and dissonance to be treated equally within the overarching coherence of the serial structure. Thus, he may have seen the increased use of consonance and elements of tonality in Op.50 as the final step in his serial odyssey, a sign that his twelve-tone method was fully developed. Another explanation may be that the attempt to incorporate tonality into the serial system, a fundamentally impossible task, is a symbolic depiction of the equally impossible attempt of humanity to reach God.

Peter Gradenwitz notes that, while many composers turn to religious composition at the end of their careers, Schoenberg's final opus should be seen as the culmination of a lifetime's effort to find God through music.³ Two themes pervade Schoenberg's religious compositions; the incomprehensible grandeur of God and the importance of prayer as a means of approaching the divine. One of the most striking example of the importance Schoenberg placed on prayer can be seen in A Survivor from Warsaw, where it is a prayer that achieves the symbolic victory over the forces of darkness. All three works of Op. 50 share this focus on the importance of prayer. In *Dreimal Tausend Jahre*, the sorrowful lamentations expressed in the opening section are transformed into prayers of thanksgiving. The text of *De Proudis* expresses the psalmist's belief that prayer and faithfulness will assure salvation, despite humanity's

³ Gradenwitz, Peter. “The Religious Works of Arnold Schoenberg.” *Music Review*. February 1960, 21(1): 19-29.

unworthiness. The text of the *Modern Psalm* addresses the issue of prayer directly, envisioning prayer as a sacred gift that can bridge the vast gulf between the insignificance of humanity and the inexpressible greatness of God.

The inability of humanity to express the grandeur of God, one of the most fundamental ideas expressed in *Moses und Aron*, is also a central theme in *Modern Psalm*. The texts of *Dreimal Tausend Jahre* and *De Profundis* focus on expectation and the promises of a deity who is not observably present. This spiritual longing resonates well with the text that Schoenberg wrote for the final piece.

One of the most daunting obstacles to accepting the concept that Schoenberg's Op. 50 is a musically unified whole is the question: why was *Modern Psalm* left incomplete? The most common reason that composers leave their final works incomplete is simple: death interrupts the compositional process. Malcolm MacDonald, in his biography of Schoenberg casts doubt on this simple explanation:

Here, again, the incompleteness is somehow artistically satisfying, its open-endedness expressing the yearning, rather than the achievement. Perhaps Schoenberg sensed this, for in the last months of his life he made no attempt to return to the unfinished score.⁴

Mark P. Risinger, goes even further, making the claim that Schoenberg made a conscious decision to end the piece because he was unable write music that could express the "divine union" described in the final lines of the text.⁵

Risinger cites as additional evidence the progressive slowing of the text setting

⁴ MacDonald, Malcolm. *Schoenberg*. (London: J. M. Dent) 1976, 216.

⁵ Risinger, Mark P. "Schoenberg's *Modern Psalm*, and the Unattainable Ending." in *Political and Religious Ideas in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg*. (New York: Garland Publishing) 2000, 289-306.

and the C minor pitch emphasis that is present at both the beginning and ending of *Modern Psalm*.

There are a number of reasons why Schoenberg left *Modern Psalm* incomplete. Schoenberg's inability to complete large-scale religious works and his idea of an unrepresentable God are well established. The question arises, therefore: could Schoenberg have harbored any illusions from the beginning that he could finish a work that addressed such an issue? There is also an abundance of evidence in the music of Op. 50 that Schoenberg created a symbolic ending for *Modern Psalm*. In addition to the "rounding off" and return to C emphasis noted by Risinger, the sense of completeness in Op. 50c is strengthened by the symmetry of the sectional divisions in the music (see p. 59). It is interesting to note that C minor is also given strong emphasis in the first work of Op. 50, *Dreimal Tausend Jahre*, which suggests that this gesture toward harmonic closure was intended from the conception of Op. 50c. Further evidence of Schoenberg's premeditation concerning a gesture toward a C emphasis is evident from the fact that *Israel Exists Again*, the unfinished fragment noted earlier as a possible precursor to *Modern Psalm* (p. 4), also begins with a strong emphasis on C. Schoenberg uses pitch emphasis in Op. 50 both to symbolize divinity and to provide a sense of harmonic closure that spans all three works.

Risinger notes that the ending of *Modern Psalm* seems to embody the combination of contradictory elements, a gesture that moves towards closure, yet retains a sense of continued searching. Examples of this type of gesture, where a consonant point of arrival is undermined by an immediate motion away, can be found in each of the works of Op. 50, a feature that acts to unify

the three pieces. This can be seen on the smallest scale in the cadential gestures of the first two phrases of *Dreimal Tausend Jahre*, which begin on points of relative consonance the move away into greater dissonance (see p. 19). The same type of gesture appears, in a larger context, at the end of Op. 50a, where the symbolic arrival on the C minor seventh chord in the second half of m. 23 is transformed into the more ambiguous symmetrical final sonority, C-A^b-B-G (0145). The point of symbolic arrival in *De Profundis* occurs in m. 48, where, at the culmination of an intensely lyrical passage, the “Rochberg” progression is given its clearest statement. This gesture also begins the final texture / density crescendo, which culminates in a final dissonant shout of affirmation. The point of symbolic arrival in *Modern Psalm* can be found in m. 80, where the choir cadences on a D-F# dyad after singing the text “*Wunder: Erfüllungen*” (Miracles: Fulfillment). Schoenberg, as Rising notes, can go no further after this symbolic arrival, so he turns back to an earlier line of the text and leaves the piece with an ending that is both complete and incomplete at the same time.

Schoenberg stated in “Brahms the Progressive” that the final work of a “great” composer should reach for “the uttermost limit of the still expressible.” Schoenberg’s Op. 50 should be seen as an artistic and personal last testament, a work that reaches for the unreachable: a reconciliation between serialism and tonality, an expression of the inexpressible grandeur of God, and a symbolic union between humanity and the divine. Schoenberg was faced with many challenges at the close of his life: poor health, difficult finances, and artistic isolation. The great faith and optimism expressed in his final opus is a fitting ending to a distinguished career.

PART TWO AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION, SYMPHONY #1