

Letters to the Editor

From David Matthews

I am happy to take up Mark Doran's suggestion to elucidate the tonal background of *A Survivor from Warsaw* (*Tempo* 218, p.55). I think it can be clearly demonstrated that in Schoenberg's later twelve-note works in general, a tonal background becomes more audibly evident. In many places in *A Survivor from Warsaw*, for instance, the harmony and the melodic lines contain tonal allusions. Moreover, the piece has from the start a strong attachment to the tonality of C, as the opening fanfare shows:

Ex.1

Ex. 1 shows the opening fanfare of *A Survivor from Warsaw*. It consists of three staves: Violins (Vlns), Trumpets (Tpts), and Double Basses (Db.). The tempo is marked $\text{♩} = 80$. The Vlns part starts with a whole note chord of E-flat major (F, A-flat, C) marked *ff*. The Tpts part has a triplet of eighth notes: G, A-flat, B-flat, followed by a quarter note C, marked *ff*. The Db. part has a whole note chord of E-flat major (F, A-flat, C) marked *ff*.

Ex. 2

Ex. 2 shows a vocal line from *A Survivor from Warsaw*, starting at bar 80. The tempo is marked *Tempo I* ($\text{♩} = 80$). The line consists of two staves of music. The first staff shows bars 80, 81, 82, 83, and 84. The second staff shows bars 85, 86, 87, and 88. The music is in 4/4 time and features a series of notes: G, A-flat, B-flat, C, D sharp, E, F, G, A-flat, B-flat, C, D sharp, E, F, G, A-flat, B-flat, C. The notes are marked with dynamics: *f* at bar 80, *ff* at bar 88. There are also triplets of eighth notes in bars 85, 86, and 87.

Despite the prominent A flat here (and in the ensuing four bars), I hear the suppressed background tonality as C major rather than C minor: the A flat wants to go down to G, the high D sharp to E which is sounded with it. This urge towards C major is confirmed by the last 20 bars of the piece, the setting of the *Schma Yisroel* for unison male chorus. The vocal line uses 109 notes; that heard most frequently (sixteen times) is C, followed by E (and C sharp: eleven times each). C is prominent in the first five bars of the vocal line, though the transposition of the initial

fanfare inevitably suggests E (major or minor), then moving to A flat major; but at bar 88 C major is triumphantly attained, the high E natural a resolution of the E flats in bar 86 (see Ex.2: words omitted).

The chorus part is doubled throughout by trombone, and so is audibly the *Hauptstimme*, but its tonal allusions tend to be contradicted by the orchestral harmony, except in bar 84 where the bass underlines A flat major. The last three bars of the piece, however, show an unprecedented tonal clarification (see Ex.3: words omitted; most orchestral parts omitted in bars 95-6).

We have here a succession of overlapping canons on the four notes of the opening fanfare, plus E and the E flat that strives towards E, which are the culmination of the chorus part. Schoenberg cuts off the canons at a point where C major is most powerfully implied, with the trumpets sounding C and E (the C reinforced by the four horns), the G in the bassoons, lower strings and tuba, and a timpani roll on C. A flat is still strongly present in the final bar on the trombones but, just as in the opening fanfare, it leans down to the G that is sounded beneath it. There is, in addition, the (fairly unobtrusive) woodwind tremolando that supplies the remain-

ing six notes of the series, which though Methodically necessary is musically somewhat questionable; but I won't start an argument about serialism here! The slight tonal ambiguity is in any case right for the piece: initial horror (the opening fanfare: reveille at the concentration camp) has been turned into triumph, but it is a grim triumph: these men are about to die. Unsullied C major would be too easy a gesture here.

Writing in the 1920s about his twelve-note technique, Schoenberg always stresses the necessary avoidance of tonal implications. In his 1946

Ex.3

Musical score for Ex.3, measures 95-99. The score includes parts for Voices, Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Violin (Vln.), Trumpet (Tpt.), Horn (Hn.), Trombone (Tbn.), Bassoon/Tuba (Bsn, Tuba), Double Bass (Vc., Db.), and Timpani (Timp.). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 40. Dynamics range from piano (p) to fortissimo (ff). The score shows a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and various articulations.

addendum to the essay 'Composition with Twelve Tones (1)' (see Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, London 1975, pp.244-5), he permits a relaxation of some of his original strictures – against octave doubling, for instance – but insists that these should not lead to the reintroduction of tonality, and he seems to be criticizing Berg for doing just this in *Lulu*. Yet Schoenberg contradicts himself in the music he was actually

writing at this time, and I believe that in re-incorporating elements of tonality into his music he only made his language richer and more eloquent, as *A Survivor from Warsaw* testifies.

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