



Arnold Schoenberg's Journey

By Allen Shawn

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Proposing that Arnold Schoenberg has been more discussed than heard, more tolerated than loved, Allen Shawn puts aside ultimate judgments about Schoenberg's place in music history to explore the composer's fascinating world in a series of linked essays--"soundings"--that are both searching and wonderfully suggestive. Approaching Schoenberg primarily from the listener's point of view, Shawn plunges into the details of some of Schoenberg's works while at the same time providing a broad overview of his involvements in music, painting, and the history through which he lived.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

There is not much that is reader friendly written about the great serialist composer just as many music lovers would argue that most of his music is not listener friendly. Composer Shawn has filled a real gap with this short, gracefully written introduction to the man and his music (what he disarmingly and correctly describes as "a mere handshake with its subject"). In alternating chapters that fill in the highlights of the life and encapsulate the composer's major works, Shawn helps readers listen anew to music that can be forbidding to an untutored ear; he is particularly eloquent on *Pierrot Lunaire*, *Erwartung* and *Book of the Hanging Gardens*, and, with his enthusiasm and judicious use of music examples, gives the composer as sympathetic a hearing as he has received in print. He also makes clear that Schoenberg was a difficult, if often admirable, man, who was deeply suspicious of others (often with reason), rigid in his beliefs, largely humorless, while at the same time principled, deeply honest and capable of great efforts in a noble cause: after he fled the Nazis to American refuge, he was tireless in his embrace of Jewish relief efforts. Shawn also examines Schoenberg's peculiar nonrelationship with Stravinsky the two great leaders of modern music virtually ignored each other for 40 years and notes the irony of the Russian's eventual conversion to the serialist persuasion. An intriguing final chapter, "Afterlife," analyzes Schoenberg's influence on his contemporaries and successors, and the course of 20th-century music. (Jan.) Forecast: Listeners of Schoenberg will welcome this valuable addition to scholarship on a still surprisingly neglected figure.

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From Library Journal

Much has been written about Arnold Schoenberg, one of the most important composers of the past century, but there is nothing quite like this remarkable little book. Pianist and composer Shawn has written a series of linked essays that effectively demystify and humanize Schoenberg, generally considered to be one of the most challenging of all modern composers. Shawn's ironic goal, stated at the conclusion of his introduction, is to give Schoenberg's work "a more superficial treatment than it has hitherto received." As Schoenberg's music has been analyzed far more than it has been listened to, Shawn presents, by contrast, a personal, nonanalytical, nonscholarly, but still learned appreciation of the man and his music. He discusses each of Schoenberg's works in chronological order, always within the larger context of his life and times. We learn of Schoenberg's numerological superstitions, embrace of Judaism and Jewish causes, complex relationship with Stravinsky, and often quaint domestic pursuits, such as carving his children's sandwiches into the shapes of musical instruments. Intended for the lay reader, the book is written in engagingly direct prose, and the few musical examples presented are not overlaid with obfuscating technical analyses. Recommended for all collections. Larry Lipkis, Moravian Coll., Bethlehem, PA

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From [Booklist](#)

The compositions of Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) are a bridge between Romantic music and difficult, dissonant "modern" concert music. The early *Gurre-Lieder* and *Verklarte Nacht* owed much to Brahms and Wagner in their use of complex harmonies, but around 1910 he began using intoned speaking--*sprechstimme*--in songs, and in *Erwartung* and *Pierrot Lunaire* he jettisoned key signatures. Not satisfied with the lack of structure in nontonal music, Schoenberg began using a defined sequence or row of the 12 semitones in an octave thematically. By starting the row on each of the twelve semitones and strictly following the intervals defining the original row along with the inverted, reverse, and reverse-inverted forms, he could construct 48

variations in his music. Detractors dismiss such music as being purely logical and lacking in emotion, but Shawn says that listening leads to appreciation. Employing many musical examples, Shawn demonstrates how Schoenberg's music changed, and he relates Schoenberg's life journey in an easily read style that illuminates the man in his music and the music in the man. *Alan Hirsch*

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Users Review

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