

ALBAN BERG

Three Orchestral Pieces Opus 6

Prelude. Slow

Rondo. At first rather hesitant. Gently lilting.

March. Moderate march tempo.

Already in his first attempts at composition, a series of diverse songs, Alban Berg demonstrated his creative talent to such an extent that in 1905 Arnold Schoenberg decided, immediately after looking through them, to teach the twenty-year-old composition without payment. Over the next few years, under Schoenberg's instruction, the „Seven Early Songs“, the Piano Sonata Opus 1, the „Four Songs“ Opus 2 and the String Quartet Opus 3 were written. In the summer of the year 1910 Alban Berg finished his composition studies, while retaining a friendly relationship with his teacher for the rest of his life

The works of the young composer which followed were created quite independently, though alongside Schoenberg's great influence, the equal importance of Gustav Mahler has been established. It is clear that he fell back on Mahler's elements of style, natural when composing for a large orchestra of symphonic proportions. While his technical dependence on Schoenberg can be best studied in the „Gurrelieder“, in the Three Orchestral Pieces Opus 6 by Alban Berg, the orchestral breadth and thematic detail makes recognition of the model clear; an attempted emulation of the Beethovenian ideal. In this way a significant link can be made, showing that the „Viennese School“ had quite conscious technical connections with the so-called „Viennese Classic“.

The Three Orchestral Pieces Opus 6 by Alban Berg were dedicated to „my teacher and friend Arnold Schoenberg, with immense gratitude and affection“. They were written in 1914, during the creative period in which he abandoned harmonically conceived tonality, despite its chromaticization and expansion. He replaced it with atonality, freed of melodic and harmonic expression. Instead, the main idea for the listener lies in the completely characteristic form of each individual piece, in which through the physical power of their expression, almost theatrical references can be recognised. The three pieces present three musical forms and patterns of expression which have been used throughout the history of music: a prelude-like introduction, a dance and a march.

The prelude begins out of silence, with the muffled rhythm of the percussion, in which the basic triplet rhythm which underpins the whole movement is stated. Strings, wind instruments and harp lead into the reverberating trombone theme, which in the following episode turns out to be particularly important. The individual thematic parts of this material are continuously developed instrumentally and illuminated from all sides as variations, until the piece ends as it has begun, forming a definite, if approximate, palindrome.

Then follows a waltz-like „Rondo“, which unites numerous dance-like elements into a grand whole. The mood is thoroughly cheerful and carefree. First comes a long alla-breve introduction whose straightforward beat forms an interesting contrast with the triple rhythm of the main section. Already in this prelude various dance-themes are indicated, which then come exuberantly alive as a waltz. Once again, the conclusion is reminiscent of the beginning, whose leisurely straightforwardness receives a brief, formal ending.

The symphonic breadth of the concluding „March“ almost has the dimensions of a symphonic movement, without having its clear formal structure. On the contrary, new motifs continue to appear, illustrating and giving a strophic element to a recurring basic theme. In this way the emotional climaxes of the piece characterise it as expressionist music, while logically it exhibits a kind of formal regression. The thematic material then disintegrates into its smallest components, until a final upsurge leads to the end of the work.

Hartmut Krones

ANTON WEBERN

Six Orchestral Pieces Opus 6

Slow

Lively

Moderate

Very moderate

Very slow

Slow

Apart from a few early works, the first compositions of Anton Webern were created under the eyes of his teacher Arnold Schoenberg, with whom the young student of musicology took private composition lessons. First the Passacaglia Opus 1, which Webern himself always considered to be his „journeyman piece“, and also the next works were clearly influenced by Schoenberg, who remained a close friend of Webern´s throughout his life. The „Six Pieces for Large Orchestra“, Opus 6 demonstrate this influence very clearly. -Webern wrote „Arnold Schoenberg, my teacher and friend, with deepest affection“ into the score. It was also Schoenberg who acted as godparent to the cycle on 31st March 1913 in the large hall of the Musikverein in Vienna - in the „scandal concert“, which had to be stopped and resulted in hand-to-hand fighting, boxed ears and finally a courtcase.

The attachment Anton Webern felt for his teacher is demonstrated in the “Six Orchestral Pieces” in diverse ways. In May 1909 Schoenberg completed his “Five Orchestral Pieces” Opus 16, the work in which he first undertook to write “Sound-colour melodies”, which is to say sounds or separate notes which were filled with life by changes in instrumentation. This new stylistic element had an exceptionally stimulating effect on Webern’s Opus 6. Again and again new sound combinations were found, partly abruptly contrasted, partly gradually developed. Individual lines were distributed among several instruments, the smallest motifs appear to have tonal diversity. And this economic orchestration also brought transparency to the enormous orchestra, distinguishing it most agreeably from the bombastic orchestration of the late romantic works written at the same time.

Beside these tonal components there is a range of of different stylistic elements which are characteristic of the early “Viennese School”: setting out from a a traditionally thematic process, Webern concentrated here on the concise organisation of thematic material, so that the separate sections are almost aphoristically short. His development of melody, no longer with a tonal focus, becomes extraordinarily expressionistic, and can only be recognised and understood in context, as Webern himself often emphasised. He also vehemently rejected the claim that his creative method was „selective“, as Willi Reich, the biographer of Schoenberg and Webern, verified.

According to the composer´s notes, the separate pieces consist of three-part song forms without any cyclical thematic connection. The first expresses in Webern´s words „the expectation of disaster, the second the certainty of its fulfilment; the third the most delicate oppositeness; it is, as it were, the introduction to the fourth, a funeral march; five and six form an epilogue: remembrance and submission.

This programmatic framework is then worked out with the stylistic features already mentioned, new sound combinations result, build in intensity and drop back again, to make room for something new. Number 1 is a conflict conceived as question and answer, allowing individual lines to relate to one another, as celeste and strings provide a formal fixed point. Piece number 2 fascinates by the variety of ways it swings within a small range of intervals, the 3rd piece by the juxtaposition of sighs and broad gestures.

The core of the work is the funeral march in the fourth piece, in which the lamenting melodies of the woodwind unfold over the muffled march rhythms of the brass and the percussion, the climax of which finally involves the whole orchestra. The final pieces have the character of a two-part farewell, where the pale timbre of the trombones primarily sets the accents in Nr. 5, while the last piece, restrained in colour from the start, “totally extinguished”, finally dies away in the pianissimo of ringing bells.

Hartmut Krones

GUSTAV MAHLER Symphony Nr. 6 in A minor

Gustav Mahler completed his Fifth Symphony in the autumn of 1902, after which he resumed the work as Artistic Director of the Vienna Opera which made such heavy demands on his time. All the same in his next summer holiday, again spent in Maiernigg on the Wörthersee, he got down to work on the preparation of a new symphonic work: the Symphony Nr. 6 in A minor. According to his wife Alma, he completed two movements in the summer of 1903, „and the ideas for the other movements were already complete in his head“, before he was caught up again with the job where he earned his living. He was not able to conclude the work before the summer of 1904, when he was mostly alone in Maiernigg - at first his wife stayed behind, as she was in an advanced state of pregnancy. She had a second daughter Anna Justina on June 15, and then joined her husband. On the 9th of September Mahler announced the completion of his „Sixth“ to his friend Arnold Berliner, and a short time later wrote to his friend and biographer Richard Specht: „My Sixth will propound riddles the solution of which may be attempted only by a generation which has absorbed and truly digested my first five symphonies.“ The instrumentation of the symphony was finally completed on May 1 1905, and the first performance was given on May 27 1906 at the Music Festival of the Allgemeine Deutsche Musikverein in Essen, under Mahler's direction.

The Sixth Symphony was soon known as the "Tragic", which according to Bruno Walter goes back to the composition itself, and Alma Mahler too reported that the work had autobiographical connotations. We also have her to thank for the following clear memories about the content and meaning of the symphony:

„After he had drafted the first movement, Mahler came down from the wood and said: 'I have tried to capture you in a theme - I don't know if I have succeeded. You must put up with it.'“ It is the great spirited theme of the first movement of the Sixth Symphony. In the third movement he portrayed the arrhythmic games of his two little children, as they tottered through the sand. Horrifying - these children's voices become increasingly tragic, and at the end a tiny dying voice whimpers. In the last movement he describes himself and his destruction, or as he later said, that of his hero. „The hero receives three blows from fate, the third of which fells him like a tree“ These are Mahler's words.

“No work flowed so directly from the heart as this. We both wept then. We felt this work and what it prophetically revealed so deeply. The Sixth is his most personal work, and a prophetic one as well. With the Kindertotenlieder as well as the Sixth, he "anticipated musically" his life. He also received three blows of fate, and the third felled him. But at that time he was cheerful, aware of the greatness of his work which was flourishing.”

Mahler's Sixth is the only one of his symphonies which closes in a dark, elegaic mood. It has neither a triumphant, heightened ending, nor a transfiguring apotheosis; many have attested to its almost „Requiem“ character, and the „heavy“ marking of the Coda with its oppressive brass chords fully justifies this interpretation. As does the unusual scoring for percussion with hammer and cowbells, as if Mahler wanted to portray the entrance of an external meaning. And the Mahler exegete Paul Bekker recognised as early as 1921, what is manifested here - "the suggestion of the grip of something other-worldly, fateful, something whose devastating, supernatural effect man can no longer fight against.”

The thematic and programmatic core is the changing major-minor triad over a pounding, sighing broken march rhythm, which is frequently used in the first movement as well as in the scherzo and the finale.- Paul Bekker called it an "irrevocable expression of fate". The use of the tam-tam, the „sound symbol of horror and death“, holds these three movements together structurally, while the cowbells ring out at the beginning and in the andante and finale. These cowbells were not a pastoral symbol for Mahler, but a portayal of „unworldly loneliness“, „like standing on the highest peak, in view of eternity.“ The hammerstrokes, originally three but in the finale version only two, can be seen as an attack of adverse fate, as this is supported by Alma Mahler's statement.

The first movement is in more or less regular sonata form with three principal themes: the march-like main theme, a restrained and atmospheric chorale, and the spirited second subject which embodied Alma Mahler, as mentioned above, after which the interpolation of elements of the main theme are to be seen as delicate symbolism. It moves forward cheerfully and ends with a brief epilogue. Besides this the major-minor-motto interspersed between the first theme and the chorale, is loaded with meaning. This thematic material is developed in the exposition in a variety of ways, the cowbells are heard again in the distance, but soon breaks out of the suggested idyll with motives from the energetic main theme. Finally the form is rounded off, the

recapitulation of the exposition is heard once more, bringing the material together in a coda, and ending with hymn-like secondary theme motifs.

Mahler first intended that the second movement should be the scherzo, but later he reversed the order of the scherzo and the andante - though the complete edition follows the original concept. This scherzo is a massive ländler, whose beginning is immediately dominated by wild tonality and demonstrates a clear relationship with the main theme of the first movement; the major-minor-motto emerges several times as a structural reminder. Then Mahler shapes the first trio with material from the ländler, its change of time portraying the arrhythmic play of his two children, bringing it to gracious, "old-fashioned" life. After a repetition of the scherzo the composer again picks up the elements of the trio - now in D major, bestows on them particularly loving attention, and ends the movement with a quotation from the ländler and a threateningly enriched coda, in which the major-minor-stamp receives increased importance.

The main theme of the third movement begins like a Song without Words "tender, but expressive", its atmosphere showing a kinship with the Kindertotenlieder. Gradually different instruments are included, a rocking motif is heard and the cadence dies away. In a second section attention is drawn to an elegaic A minor song, it has an idyllic pastoral atmosphere, and ends with an "expression of ecstasy"(Bekker). Again the structure is formed by the main theme, which calls for a carefully worked out variation of the second section and finally brings about the weightless final song.

The 822 bars of the monumental, colossal finale are so to speak a „work within a work“; indeed Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno described it as „the core of Mahler's entire oeuvre“. The 100 bar introduction, which starts in C minor, uses tremoli and arpeggios to create an aura of mystery, and places over this the broad main theme. The major-minor-motto sounds, before „deep bell chimes in the distance“ constitute a second level of music - an unreal dreamlike restrained sigh. A grave wind chorale reinforces the gloomy atmosphere. After a repetition of this atmospheric section, the gradually intensifying main part rises, with its broad, fateful central theme, which is continued in a variety of ways, and followed by a D major secondary theme. This has a clear connection with the Alma theme of the first movement which thus appears structurally re-shaped. Four episodes develop the material in broad sections, between them „deep bell chimes“ provide a restrained mood, three tam-tam strokes and two hammer-blows provide dramatic climaxes, and chorale-memories supply „eternal“ associations. Finally the material is worked through once more in the recapitulation, finding its way to a hymn-like final song, and to the coda which brings together the negative elements, sinks back into hopelessness, and with an inexorable marchlike rhythm dies away.

Hartmut Krones