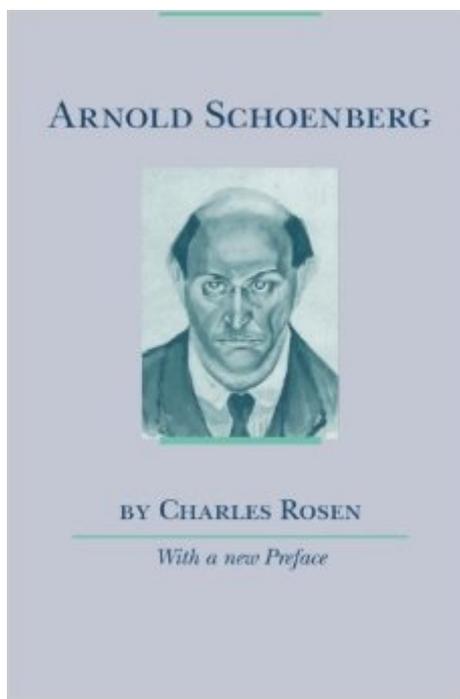


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# Arnold Schoenberg



## Synopsis

In this lucid, revealing book, award-winning pianist and scholar Charles Rosen sheds light on the elusive music of Arnold Schoenberg and his challenge to conventional musical forms. Rosen argues that Schoenberg's music, with its atonality and dissonance, possesses a rare balance of form and emotion, making it, according to Rosen, "the most expressive music ever written." Concise and accessible, this book will appeal to fans, non-fans, and scholars of Schoenberg, and to those who have yet to be introduced to the works of one of the greatest composers of the twentieth century. "Arnold Schoenberg is one of the most brilliant monographs ever to be published on any composer, let alone the most difficult master of the present age. . . . Indispensable to anyone seeking to understand the crucial musical ideas of the first three decades." "Robert Craft, New York Review of Books" "What Mr. Rosen does far better than one could reasonably expect in so concise a book is not only elucidate Schoenberg's composing techniques and artistic philosophy but to place them in history." "Donal Henahan, New York Times Book Review" "For the novice and the knowledgeable, Mr. Rosen's book is very important reading, either as an introduction to the master or as a stimulus to rethinking our opinions of him. Mr. Rosen's accomplishment is enviable." "Joel Sachs, Musical Quarterly

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## Customer Reviews

Robert Craft was on the money in his description of this monograph as "one of the most brilliant ever to be published on any composer, let alone the most difficult master of the present age."

Stripping away any unnecessary biographical details, Mr. Rosen gives a surprisingly deep and insightful chronicle (for so short a book) of both the music of Schoenberg and that of his contemporaries. Whatever path serialism was to follow after Schoenberg, his own personal reasons for creating it are elucidated here more clearly and with greater historical insight than anywhere else that I am aware of. It has been popular of late to denigrate Serialism, implicating Schoenberg in some of the excesses of his followers. This has always seemed to stem from some fundamental misunderstandings about just what it was Schoenberg was setting out to do when he created his twelve-tone system. This work should be mandatory reading for those revanchist musicians and neo-tonalists who practice a sort of musical revisionism in their assessments of Schoenberg's work--indeed, for anyone who is interested in gaining insight into a composer of unquestionable genius.

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seeing that this is such a small book (barely 100 pages of text), i was surprised at the depth of this book. as one reviewer wrote, it does not get into specifics about his life ('journeys' by allen shawn is good for that), but it gets into enough. i was especially pleased with the musical analysis of schoenberg's music that was presented here, which those who understand music can appreciate; such is left out of many musical biographies that i have read, and that is why i appreciate it here. it does lend a tremendous assistance in understanding his music, and his working philosophy. (that said, though, it might mean that this isnt the book for you if you dont want to get into theory; again,

shawn's book is an excellent alternative then.)in fact, after reading this, i started to read schoenberg's writings on music theory, which ifound enlightening.

Rosen offers a brief and invaluable presentation of formal and critical factors for appraising dodecaphonic music of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern through an analysis of representative major works from Schoenberg's oeuvre. His primary argument is that the "emancipation of dissonance" brought to flower by the Second Viennese School consists not in the ubiquitous deployment of discordant harmonic and melodic intervals, but in a deeper move to abandon cadence as the dominant organizational principle in music. The intervals themselves are no more dissonant than those commonly found in Debussy or Mahler, but no attempt is made to resolve them by returning to the fundamental triad of the work. By turning from cadence to serialism, Rosen argues, Schoenberg follows the path laid out by Brahms and Wagner in organizing musical ideas by motives and melodic development rather than by key. In this sense, and especially in the techniques the serialists exploit to vary the row, they resemble the polyphonists of the Ars Nova and Renaissance more than the homophonic classicists or Romantics who preceded them. This is a forceful and useful argument that Rosen presents clearly and thoughtfully, and this book may be of great service to those who hear anarchy or anomie in the so-called atonal movement. However, after careful consideration I think he considerably overstates the function of cadence in determining the psychoacoustic experience of dissonance. I think the naive listener could very well listen to musical development that stretches or breaks tonic resolution, such as the progressive tonality found in Mahler's fifth symphony, without any particular experience of tension or dissonance.

Every book I've ever read by Charles Rosen and has deeply affected my view of the topic, and this little book is no exception. There isn't much biography in this book, it is strictly music criticism, focusing on the 'victory' of Schoenberg as well as his two students Webern and Berg. This book went a long way in helping me to understand the aesthetics of serialism. I don't think a nonmusician would find much use in it, but I think anyone who is a musician at all and has experienced Schoenberg's music will be able to get a lot out of it.

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