

The *Mysterious* Mr. Hauer

Josef Matthias Hauer (1883-1959) would add the following to his signature with a rubber stamp: "The spiritual author and (despite many imitators!) still the sole expert in, and practitioner of, twelve-tone music." Is it *possible* that this forgotten composer could have originated the system credited to Arnold Schoenberg, his senior by almost a decade?

Hauer's early works were in a free atonal style, but while recovering in a rest home from a serious illness in 1919, he discovered his twelve-tone theory, which he believed reflected "the law of the cosmos," and began publishing music and theoretical works expounding the system. Meanwhile, Schoenberg, with whom he had been in casual contact since 1913, had been secretly working out *his* twelve-tone system (telling only Rufer in 1921). Hauer actually performed his twelve-tone "Nomos" at one of Schoenberg's historic Society for Private Musical Performance concerts in 1920. This did not precipitate Schoenberg to announce his own system—perhaps he did not perceive that "Nomos" was twelve-tone or did not think that others would. In 1925, however, when he became aware of Hauer's articles, Schoenberg, fearing that others would imagine that he was following Hauer, solemnly revealed to his disciples the technique which he was certain would "ensure the hegemony of German music for centuries." The two composers attempted for a time to remain amicable, and even discussed collaborating on a book or starting a school. A truce between such irascible egotists was doomed, though, and by 1924, the two, meeting in a cafe, were reduced to shouting at one another "I am the inventor!" "I am the inventor!" It was, according to an eyewitness, "very lively."

In this case, the issue of precedence depends not only on chronological data, but also on one's definition of "twelve-tone music." (If it is taken to mean merely the thematic use of a twelve-tone row, then, as Schoenberg himself liked to joke, Bach, with the last fugue from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* book one, becomes the first twelve-tone composer.) Both Hauer and Schoenberg sought to enrich atonal music with a new organizing principle, one which like the late lamented "tonality" would pervade all

A genius... or just a kook?

aspects of pitch. Hauer ordered the twelve tones into forty-four different "tropes." Each of these was subdivided into two groups of six notes, and within these two groups, any order could be used. Moreover, the composer was not obliged to construct each piece with a single trope, but could mix them at will. Schoenberg's system, on the other hand, allows only forms derived from a single tone row (an ordering of the chromatic scale with all notes present and none repeated), in order to ensure unity, and also to postpone repetitions of each tone as long as possible, thus avoiding the misleading impression of any predominating "tonic" note. Despite some resemblances to Schoenberg's system, Hauer's does not address its rationale.

To Schoenberg, therefore, Hauer's must have seemed an empty mockery of his own technique. If, however, for the sake of argument, we choose to regard the two methods as similar enough to be comparable, Hauer would

unquestionably be the first to publish a twelve-tone piece.

The cool, meditative quality, simple texture, and regular flowing rhythm of the present piece will make clearer than any explanation just how different Hauer's music was from that of Schoenberg and his circle, technically and esthetically. While Hauer was justified in feeling bitter that his reputation as pioneer was obscured by Schoenberg's fame, Schoenberg was right to feel that his own system, arrived at independently, owed nothing to Hauer.

Subsequently, Hauer was performed by such major conductors of the day as Rosbaud, Klemperer and Scherchen, but perhaps his greatest honor (although he may not have recognized it as such) was his inclusion in the Nazi exhibition of "degenerate art," in the company of such significant composers as Weill, Hindemith and Webern. In later life, supported by inherited money, government grants and patronage, he was able to retreat ever more into abstract meditation—all his late compositions are in the form of "twelve-tone games." He finally divested himself of his entire library, save for one book—the *I Ching* (the Chinese *Book of Changes*).

A character in Werfel's 1923 novel, *Verdi*, is said to be a perfect depiction of Hauer's cranky personality. The young German composer Fischboeck, ill with a nervous fever, flabbergasts the fictional Verdi by spewing out contempt for the emotionalism of Beethoven and Wagner, explaining that the art of music is waiting for redemption by the purity of Fischboeck's music. Verdi finds the young man's music utterly mad, but is deeply impressed by Fischboeck's fanatical belief in himself. Could Fischboeck, he wonders, possibly be the transcendental genius he imagines himself to be?