

Listening Guide

Webern: Symphony, Opus 21, Second Movement

DATE OF WORK: 1928

MEDIUM: Chamber orchestra

MOVEMENTS: I. Ruhig schreitend (moving quietly); sonata form, with double canon for 4 voices
II. Variationen (Theme and variations)

HARMONIC STRUCTURE: Twelve-tone

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Transparent tone color and pointillistic texture; each instrument given just one or two notes, often in extreme high or low registers. New pitch language that is highly concentrated. Arched form, with Variation 4, which is slow and subtle, as turning point.

First Movement: Sonata form, with double canon

Original form of tone row (note that the second half of the row—the last six pitches—are the retrograde of the first):



Second Movement: Theme and variations

Basis: 11-measure theme, based on the transposed inversion and retrograde inversion of tone row from first movement; inverted tone row heard in harp and French horn; retrograde inversion of same row heard in clarinet and bass clarinet

Character: Pointillistic, disjunct

Forms of tone row used (transposed up 1 step from original):

(Transposed up one whole step)

Inversion → □

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

← [Retrograde inversion

Theme: Sehr ruhig (very quiet)

Gentle statement in clarinets, with muted horns and harps.

Variation 1: Lebhafter (livelier)

Muted string; 4-part double canon in contrary motion; alternation of pizzicato and bowed notes; second half of variation is retrograde of first half.

Variation 2: Sehr lebhaft (very lively)

Clarinet, bass clarinet, and horn, with harp and occasional strings.

Variation 3: Wieder mässiger (again more moderately)

Ensemble, in pointillistic style.

Variation 4: Äusserst ruhig (extremely quiet)

Ensemble, in slowest section with dense counterpoint.

Variation 5: Sehr lebhaft (very lively)

Strings and harp, in ostinato that builds in volume.

Variation 6: Marschmässig (marchlike)

Clarinet, bass clarinet, and horn; canons in woodwinds with sustained horn notes.

Variation 7: Etwas breiter (somewhat broader)

Ensemble, double canon in contrary motion.

Coda:

Theme and retrograde form in clarinet, harp, violin, and cello; closes with harp notes.