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The 'Notes'¹ on his meeting with Warner by Ben Huebsch, editor and vice president of the Viking Press and publisher of the American edition of Warner's novel *Lolly Willowes*, contain the only reference that is currently known to Warner's plan to study with the composer Arnold Schoenberg. The 'Notes' are undated but mention her next planned novel, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, which probably dates the document to 1926.

There are 98 letters to Huebsch in the Warner Archive, the earliest dated 6 March 1926.² A friendship and correspondence developed from the meeting described, some of the letters on professional matters regarding the publication of her work in the United States, and some more personal ones about her life. They met at least twice after 1926. Huebsch met Warner's ship when she visited New York in 1929 and showed her around the city, and he visited her home in Frome Vauchurch, Dorset in 1931. Warner also sent her manuscript poems to him in 1940 for safekeeping during the war in Europe.

Warner's regard for Huebsch is evident in a letter to Joy and Marchette Chute written shortly after his death in 1964: 'I loved him dearly, and still see him in this garden, drinking a vin rosé and completely foxed by the phenomenon of the Parish Magazine.'³

No comment by Warner on Schoenberg or his music has yet been found in any letter or commonplace book, nor does she mention him retrospectively in her diaries. In contrast, she has many references to prominent early twentieth-century English composers whom she came to know, among them Ralph Vaughan Williams, Herbert Howells, John Ireland and Gustav Holst. It would be unusual that a life-changing plan of studying abroad was not mentioned in later diary entries if studying with Schoenberg had been a realistic possibility.

This anomaly has prompted my research into Schoenberg and his circle to try to establish his teaching ethos, together with events that may have been influential both for Warner and for the musical life of England in the early twentieth century. The notes below set out information about Schoenberg at this time, the performance in London, on two occasions, of his work *Five Orchestral Pieces* and the reception that each of the performances received. The notes conclude with an assessment of the likelihood of Warner studying with the avant-garde composer.

Around 1908 Schoenberg began composing in a startlingly innovative way using a chromatic scale of 12 pitches, each a semitone above or below the other, and not in the primary diatonic scale of eight pitches that was conventional. He became one of the most controversial composers in the history of music by breaking with the established musical order to find a new form of musical expression. In the early years of the century Alban Berg and Anton von Webern became his pupils, presumably by personal interview, as this letter to Roberto Gerhard, who became a pupil, sets out:

Dear Sir,

At present I have no time to look into your compositions more closely, but a fleeting glance and your letter give me a very good impression. Frankly, the final decision whether I take someone on as a pupil usually depends on the personal impression I get of him, and that is why I prefer to see people first ... With kind regards and looking forward with much interest to making your acquaintance.

Arnold Schoenberg⁴

Schoenberg did not make life easy for his followers as he regarded their interest in any modern music other than his own as a betrayal, which appears a rigid and unforgiving method of teaching. However, both Berg and Webern were devoted to Schoenberg, and Webern in particular did all he could to find patrons for his master and to urge performances of his works. In this regard, both he and Berg conformed to Schoenberg's ethos of fulfilling 'their promise as composers through acceptance and individual reinterpretation of the successive steps in their master's development, [bringing him] the support of their life-long personal and artistic loyalty'.⁵

Oskar Fried was an influential conductor whose musicianship Warner was to approve in later years, as this account of a concert from her diary shows:

The conductor was Fried, very good ... [he] appears to be a cantankerous fellow, but when the orchestra laughed at his

English he said ‘Gentlemen, there are millions of people who can speak English but not many who can conduct’; and as he *can* conduct, I like this well.⁶

Webern had visited Fried in Berlin on Schoenberg’s behalf in 1911. There he met Fried’s pupil, Edward Clark, who had moved to Berlin in 1909 as music correspondent for the English journal *The Musical Times*. Although Clark had no formal musical training and played no instrument, Fried had agreed to give him lessons in conducting. In October 1910 Clark was introduced to Schoenberg by Fried at a rehearsal of the latter’s *Pelleas und Melisande* and found the performance ‘an overwhelming revelation’.⁷ After this performance Clark was determined to study with Schoenberg and, surprisingly, managed to achieve his aim, becoming ‘Schoenberg’s only pre-1914 pupil from the English-speaking world’.⁸ He studied with the composer from 1911 until 1914, assisting him in his move from Vienna to Berlin at the end of 1911. Schoenberg did not return to Vienna until late in 1915. Clark obviously had great powers of persuasion and appears to have been useful in promoting Schoenberg’s music.

Schoenberg’s *Five Orchestral Pieces* was published in 1910 and a copy found its way to Sir Henry Wood, founder of the promenade concerts in London. On 3 September 1912 Wood conducted the first public performance of the work anywhere in the world at a prom in the Queen’s Hall in London. No communication with Schoenberg had occurred: the composer discovered that his work was to be played from an advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper on 31 August.⁹

The impact of the first performance was devastating for an audience used to established Western harmony, particularly as its place in the concert programme was between an aria from Saint-Saëns’ *Samson et Dalila* and a Mendelssohn piano concerto. The influential music critic Ernest Newman wrote of the performance:

It is not often that an English audience hisses the music it does not like, but a good third of the people at Queen’s Hall last Tuesday permitted themselves that luxury after the performance of the five orchestral pieces [sic] of Schoenberg. Another third ... was laughing, and the remaining third seemed too puzzled either to laugh or hiss; on the whole, it does not look as if Schoenberg has made many friends in London.¹⁰

However, another critic gave warning about ridiculing the work:

Past generations of critics unhesitatingly condemned the new and strange and unintelligible, and are now held up to pity and ridicule. If we pour scorn on our 'Futurist' school, are we preparing the same fate for ourselves?¹¹

A little over a year later Henry Wood asked Clark to relay an invitation to Schoenberg, offering the composer the opportunity to conduct the second performance of the *Five Orchestral Pieces* with the Queen's Hall Orchestra.¹² Schoenberg accepted the invitation and the performance was scheduled for 17 January 1914. Although better received by an audience who had grown more accustomed to new music in the intervening year, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and *Petrushka* having been performed in England for the first time in the interim, it was still unfavourably reviewed by the musical press:

Shall we ever get used to Schoenberg's method? That I doubt: for it is quite a new thing in the history of music for a composer to be beyond the comprehension of progressive musicians. We are justified in asking whether it is possible for one man to be so far ahead of the whole musical world, or whether there is not some defect in his thinking as well as ours.¹³

For the unnamed reviewer in the *Musical News*, Schoenberg's music

appears to resemble the inconsequent wanderings of a brain that is – shall we say? – abnormal. The question is whether Herr Schoenberg is making some contribution to the evolution of the art, or whether he is producing a more sporadic manifestation of anarchy.¹⁴

The questioning of Schoenberg's mental capacity in a musical journal is surprising and extreme; the reviewer allies his music to social upheaval and unrest in strong terms.

However, young English composers were fascinated by Schoenberg's methods and his music, Gustav Holst and Philip Heseltine (Peter Warlock) in particular, and interest in the composer reached its peak in England in the first six months of 1914. Unfortunately for Schoenberg the outbreak of war ended the embryonic acceptance of his music by fellow-composers in England, and interest in his music

after the war never regained the momentum of the early months of 1914.

Ben Huebsch comments in the 'Notes' that 'the war brought disappointment to [Warner] in that it interfered with her plans to go to Vienna to study composition with Schönberg'. It is possible that Warner attended one or both of the prom performances of the *Five Orchestral Pieces*, was entranced by the complexity and novelty of the music and determined to approach the composer as a prospective pupil. She may also have acquired a published copy of the work to study; it should be remembered that at this time Warner believed music to be her metier.¹⁵ It would have been possible for Percy Buck, Warner's music teacher at the time and somebody who knew all of the important musicians in London including Henry Wood, to have facilitated a meeting between Warner and Schoenberg in January 1914 when the composer was in London. No such meeting is mentioned retrospectively in later diaries or letters and there are no letters between Warner and Schoenberg, or Buck and Schoenberg, listed in the Schoenberg Archive in Vienna.

The question of how Warner could have become part of this sensational new sphere in music raises several issues. The first issue with Warner's statement as given by Huebsch, and a major one, is that Schoenberg was not in Vienna between the last months of 1911 and the end of 1915; he was living in Berlin. He returned to Vienna for military service late in 1915 and undertook brief periods of this in 1916 and 1917 before being discharged on medical grounds. If studying with Schoenberg had been a real aspiration of Warner's at that time, it could be expected that she would know in which country he was living. This lack of knowledge also raises the question of planning and financing the time to be spent abroad.

A second issue is one of gender. The letter by Schoenberg to Roberto Gerhard cited above specifically states: 'whether I take someone on as a pupil usually depends on the personal impression I get of him'.¹⁶ This letter and Schoenberg's stringent teaching methods make it unlikely that he would have accepted a female pupil at that date. Dika Newlin (1923–2006) and Patricia Carpenter (1923–2000) are the only female pupils of Schoenberg to be found in the relevant records. Both were American citizens. Newlin was a prodigy, graduating from Michigan State University when only sixteen years old. She moved to Los Angeles to be tutored by Schoenberg who was then teaching at the University of California. Newlin went on to have an academic career in music and also wrote about Schoenberg. Carpenter studied with the composer between 1942 and 1949 and

also went on to have an academic career in music, becoming Professor of Music at Columbia University. Both of these women studied with Schoenberg almost thirty years after Warner's supposed plan to do so; by this time the composer, who had emigrated to the US in 1934, was firmly established there.

A further issue is that Warner would have had to have attained a sufficient level of compositional mastery, and a demonstrable kinship with the chromatic scale, for this proposal to have been seriously considered. As construed from the letter to Gerhard, she may also have had to submit several compositions for assessment in order for Schoenberg to be convinced that there could be mutual understanding and benefit from her becoming his pupil.

Berg and Webern progressed to become acknowledged practitioners of twelve-tone composition, perhaps the most innovative movement in twentieth-century music, and Warner's musical ability would surely have had to have been exceptional for her to have been considered by Schoenberg. However, there is no evidence that Warner had reached such a level of musicianship in 1914. She destroyed many of her compositions of this period, as her diary entry of 17 November 1928 notes: 'I had gone through and thrown away a great deal of my own music, 1911–1915'.¹⁷ If Warner had attended a performance of Schoenberg's *Five Orchestral Pieces* in 1912 or 1914, her compositions after it may have been an attempt to compose atonal music in the Schoenberg style. However, the small amount of Warner's music that survives is not atonal and diary entries of 1929–30 detailing concerts that she had attended bear witness to her apparent impatience with music that, whilst rooted in the Romantic vein, had obsessive driving force and dissonance:

The Bruckner I found hard to stomach. It is all mental music, weak and scrappy and forever going up to climaxes and down again like someone industriously practising scales.¹⁸

Warner writes a similarly negative comment in her diary for 21 January 1930:

Went to the Music Society [heard] an affair for octet by D.Szostakovicz [sic] [Opus 11, Two Pieces for String Octet], opening with a series of sit on the piano chords, then a scherzo full of artless discords and squeaks, but all in four bar phrases saying the identical thing three times.¹⁹

The Bruckner piece at the 1928 concert was the *Eighth Symphony*, composed in 1887 and revised in 1890. Warner's response to it is echoed in a review of 2013 describing 'the terrifying abysses of dissonance in the first movement'.²⁰ The octet by Shostakovich is an early work composed in 1925 when he was nineteen years old. At this time, he had 'allied himself with the forward-looking principles of the Association for Contemporary Music, which actively promoted the study and performance of contemporary Western music by such composers as Hindesmith, Berg and Schoenberg'.²¹

Taken together, these examples show Warner's difficulty with this type of modern music and she was, therefore, unlikely to be at home in the Second Viennese School of Schoenberg and his disciples. This observation is reinforced by Huebsch's comment in his 'Notes' that in their conversation Warner 'holds that the hope of English musical development is not in imitating the Continental moderns but in reviving and applying the historic idiom'.²² Her admiration for the folk-inspired music of Vaughan Williams, also recorded by Huebsch in the 'Notes', supports this opinion and may also indicate that she would find Schoenberg's music unappealing.

It is possible that Huebsch in his talk with Warner misunderstood and interpreted what may have been a discussion between Warner and Buck on a possible way forward regarding studying composition with Schoenberg, as a positive plan for her to study with the composer.

It is also possible that the rapport that began at this first meeting between Warner and Huebsch may have a bearing on the mention of Schoenberg during it; the talk of the interrupted plan to study with Schoenberg by Warner may even have been a gentle jest. Huebsch appears to have been bemused in the meeting and writes in his 'Notes' about Warner being a witch: 'who that reads "Lolly" can believe it to be *entirely* a product of the imagination!'²³ Warner's subsequent warmth towards Huebsch in their correspondence also lends credence to the possibility of her teasing him.

It can be seen, I believe, that the evidence for the proposed pupillage with Schoenberg is thin and perhaps it is time that it is allowed to become doubtful or speculative rather than treated as substantive.

Notes

1 Ben Huebsch, 'Some Notes on Sylvia Townsend Warner', *Journal of the Sylvia*

Townsend Society (2017), pp. 27–30. Huebsch's three pages of typed notes,

- held in the Warner Archive, Dorset County Museum, record their meeting in London, probably in 1926.
- 2 See Peter Tolhurst, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner's Letters: Where Are They Now?', *Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Society* (2016), p. 72.
 - 3 Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), p. 214.
 - 4 *Arnold Schoenberg's Letters*, ed. Erwin Stein (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 102. Letter of 4 November 1923. 'Die letzte Entscheidung, ob ich jemand als Schüler annehme, liegt meist an dem persönlichen Eindruck, den ich von ihm bekomme, und darum sehe ich die Menschen gerne vorher.' Arnold Schoenberg, *Ausgewählte Briefe*, ed. Erwin Stein (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1958), p. 106.
 - 5 O.W. Neighbour, 'Arnold Schoenberg', in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 579.
 - 6 Sylvia Townsend Warner, unpublished diary, 4 April 1930. Warner Archive.
 - 7 Elizabeth Lutyens, *A Goldfish Bowl* (London: Cassell, 1972), p. 95.
 - 8 Leo Black, translator, marginal note, in Willi Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 162.
 - 9 David Lambourn, 'Henry Wood and Schoenberg', *Musical Times* 128 (1987), pp. 422–7 (422).
 - 10 Ernest Newman, 'The Case of Arnold Schoenberg', *The Nation* (1912), p. 830.
 - 11 Unsigned review of Schoenberg concert, *Musical Times* 93 (1912), p. 647.
 - 12 Lambourne, 'Henry Wood and Schoenberg', p. 424.
 - 13 Newman, review of Schoenberg concert, *Musical Times* 55 (1914), p. 88.
 - 14 Unsigned review of Schoenberg concert, *Musical News* 56 (1914), p. 73.
 - 15 Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), p. 48.
 - 16 The German original also uses a masculine form: 'ob ich jemand als Schüler annehme, liegt meist an dem persönlichen Eindruck, den ich von ihm bekomme' (emphasis added). See note 4 above.
 - 17 Warner, unpublished diary, 17 November 1928. Warner Archive.
 - 18 Warner, unpublished diary, 20 November 1929. Warner Archive.
 - 19 Unpublished diary, 21 January 1930.
 - 20 Tom Service, *Symphony Guide: Bruckner's Eighth*. Online: www.theguardian.com. Accessed 6 June 2017.
 - 21 Godfrey Norris and David Nice, 'Shostakovich', in *Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Alison Latham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 1149.
 - 22 Huebsch, 'Notes', p. 29.
 - 23 Huebsch, 'Notes', p. 28.

Note on contributor

Lynn Mutti spent a long working life as a professional librarian in universities, private companies and museums in the UK and Canada, and also as a freelance researcher. Although not a musician, she is passionate about classical music and some of the materials in the Warner Archive in the Dorset County Museum led her to research Warner's early life as a musicologist. She is currently a PhD student at University College London, in the latter stages of a thesis that aims to tell us more about Warner's life in music as composer and musicologist, and to explore how music informs her writing.