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WEBERN'S SKETCHES (I)

Roger Smalley

IN TEMPO 91 I wrote an article on the recently discovered and published sketches of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.¹ Since that time an equally handsome volume of sketches by Anton Webern has appeared.² Studying the sketchbooks of a great composer is perhaps the closest we can ever come to experiencing the act of creation. It is still—invariably—a second-hand experience, but one which enables us to follow the process of creation with more immediacy than does the analysis of an already completed score. If we analyze a finished work we can learn a great deal about the structure of that work in particular, and about compositional techniques in general. As composition progresses, the musical ideas with which the composer started out begin to develop according to their own inner logic. Eventually the composer is no longer in the position of dictating events but of attempting to discover and follow the logical development which the music itself dictates to him.

By studying the first sketches of a work we learn less about the structure of the work as a whole but more about the composer's own creative processes. At this stage the musical material has not yet taken on a life of its own. The composer is still teasing it into shape, playing around with it on the page to see what potentialities are revealed, what possibilities are suggested. The fundamental nature of a composer's creative personality is most clearly shown in the way he approaches and grapples with these basic compositional decisions. We can observe the delicate balance which has to be maintained between the tendency of the musical material to suggest its own destiny and the composer's constant desire to mould its destiny himself. This struggle to achieve an equilibrium between opposing forces is much more evident in Webern's sketches than in those for *The Rite of Spring*. The majority of Stravinsky's musical ideas came to him quickly and almost fully formed. The sketches are mainly concerned with the order of events, and with small modifications of detail. For Webern it was a much slower and more painstaking process. This does not mean that Webern was a less 'inspired' composer than Stravinsky. But he was a more idealistic one. He was possessed by the vision of a music in which every element would be perfectly proportioned, bal-

anced and integrated. Throughout his life he strove to fulfil this ideal and, as these sketches so clearly show, whenever he realized that he had embarked upon a false or unfruitful trail he simply abandoned it and started afresh. Stravinsky, on the other hand, once claimed never to have wasted any of his musical ideas. If they ultimately proved inappropriate to the work in whose context they were initially thought of, they would be used in a subsequent one. Certainly there is virtually nothing in the *Rite of Spring* sketches which did not eventually appear in the finished work.

Even so, what we can see in Webern's sketchbooks tells only part of the story. For between each sketch lies a thought process which is sometimes clear but often opaque and problematical. At one point in his commentary to the sketches Krenek writes: 'To pursue such conjectures any further would seem presumptuous'. But in the following discussion I have presumed to conjecture further. I have not only described what is there, but have also tried, however imperfectly, to imagine myself in Webern's position and to recreate the train of thought which links each sketch with the next. The results make no claims to the truth; they are—and must remain—in the realm of conjecture. I hope that they will at least have the effect of stimulating others to modify or to amplify them. Before turning to a more detailed analysis of the sketches, however, it will be useful to fill in the historical background and examine the criteria of selection and manner of presentation employed in the present volume.

From 1899 until 1925 Webern wrote his sketches on loose sheets of manuscript paper. These were found, as recently as October 1965, by Hans Moldenhauer in the attic of the Vienna home of Webern's mother-in-law. In a fascinating article recounting the circumstances of this remarkable discovery, Moldenhauer lists some of the contents of the manuscripts.³ The latest works he mentions are 'the charming *Kinderstück* for piano solo of 1924 (where Webern first employed Schoenberg's newly evolved 12-note technique); and two string trios of 1925'.⁴ From 1925 onwards, however, Webern made his sketches in a series of six large bound volumes. These contain, with the exception of the two published movements of the String Trio op. 20, the sketches of all Webern's works from op. 17 to op. 31, as well as sketches for many hitherto unknown and unfinished projects.

The first sketchbook, only 32 pages long, is in the archives of Universal Edition, Vienna; the remaining five (containing a total of 422 pages) are collected, together with all the material found in the Vienna attic, in the Webern Archive which forms part of the Moldenhauer Archive in Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.⁵

The present volume contains full-size (27x33.5 cm) photo-reproductions of 47 pages selected from these last five sketchbooks. Hans Moldenhauer contributes a brief foreword, and this is followed by a full-page reproduction of the terracotta bust of Webern made in 1928 by Josef Humplink (husband of Hildegard Jone, the poetess from whose works Webern drew the texts of all his vocal music from op. 23 onwards). The listing of the plates and their contents is very thorough, making identification simple; they are also collated with their original page numbers in the sketchbooks. A commentary on the sketches is provided by Ernst Krenek, who was a friend of Webern for many years (an experience touchingly recalled in his brief tribute in the Webern issue of *Die Reihe*).⁶ This excellent essay forms an indispensable adjunct to the sketches. Krenek clarifies many of the problems encountered in studying them, such as the exact sequence of events on each page, the way in which Webern wrote out and

numbered his tables of sets, and the relationship (both in time and in substance) of the sketches to his completed works. Webern was in the habit of beginning to sketch on the right-hand side of each double-page spread and subsequently making revisions to this material on the facing left-hand page. Thus the sequence of sketches frequently proceeds both forwards and backwards. This can make the establishment of continuity a little difficult at times, although with the aid of Webern's liberal deployment of stars, arrows and *vi-de* signs and, of course, the musical material itself, it is generally possible, after a little study, to determine the original order.

Webern did not confine his sketchbooks solely to musical matters. He also made diary entries in them, mainly concerned with the two things which, apart from music, affected him most deeply. These were his family ('February 9 [1944] Peterl [Webern's grandson] born; February 26 baptism') and his walking tours in the Austrian Alps (see the 'programmes' of the Concerto op. 24 and the Saxophone Quartet op. 22, below). Krenek translates these and most of the other verbal remarks to be found in the sketches; he also identifies the people and places mentioned.

The pages reproduced in this volume contain, with one exception, sketches for abandoned and unfinished compositions. In the case of *The Rite of Spring* the situation was quite different—the surviving sketches were printed in their entirety and could be compared, at every stage, with the published score. For the majority of these Webern sketches no final score exists for comparison; they never progressed further than the fragmentary forms presented here. This makes elucidation of the composer's ultimate aims and intentions much more problematic, and I cannot help thinking that in spite of the great attractions of being able to study these fragments for the first time it might have been more useful to begin by publishing the sketches for some of his completed works. Let me at least express the hope that eventually Webern's entire sketches will be made available in a similar form. On the basis of the volume already published I have no hesitation in stating that far from being mere historical curiosities they will profoundly enrich our knowledge and understanding of Webern's work.

Krenek's commentary is so thorough that it renders further introductory remarks on my part superfluous; they would in any event be of little use without the sketches themselves to hand. I therefore propose to discuss in more analytical detail, with music examples transcribed from the sketches, some of the most interesting and revealing pages in the volume. The three selections which I have made are from Plates 33—37 (which show the evolution of the set and first three bars of the Concerto op. 24), Plates 25—32 (which show the genesis of a projected third movement for the Saxophone Quartet op. 22) and Plates 4—8, the most extensive series of sketches in the book, which are of a projected third movement for the String Trio op. 20.⁷ My analyses will not be exhaustive, given the limitations of the available material. The particular characteristics of each of the three selections has suggested, in each case, a concentration on one specific aspect of the music. These are set-structure (op. 24), the formation of a variation theme (op. 22), and broader aspects of form (op. 20).

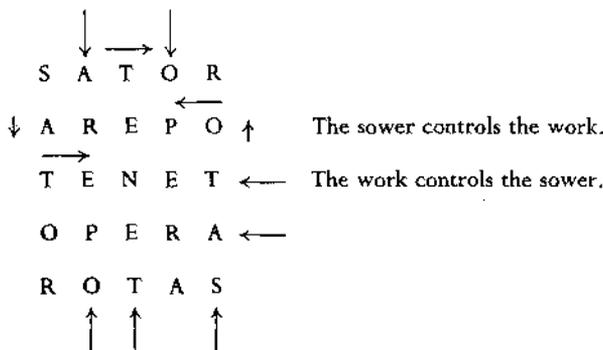
Webern's musical handwriting is unfailingly neat, but it is also very small and in some places (the string trio movement for example) there is a great deal of crossing out and alteration. It is generally possible, however, to check such things as dubious accidentals (sharp and natural signs are sometimes indistinguishable) and missing clefs by reference to the set tables. In the transcriptions, all

such editorial decisions and additions are enclosed in square brackets. I have also added consistent bar numbering and indications (in German) of instrumentation, both of which are entered only erratically in the sketches themselves.

* * *

CONCERTO FOR NINE INSTRUMENTS OP. 24

But I think I have laid a good foundation for something new (for orchestra). I have found a 'row' (that's the 12 notes) that contains already in itself very extensive relationships (of the 12 notes amongst themselves). It is something similar to the famous old proverb:



To read horizontally;

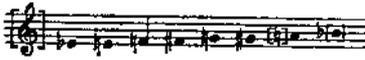
So: Sator opera (retrograde of arepo)
 tenet, tenet
 opera sator (retrograde of rotas)

Then vertically: from top to bottom; upwards; downwards, upwards (tenet twice over), downwards; upwards. Then vertically again starting at the bottom right: upwards, downwards etc.⁸

This passage has often been quoted to demonstrate Webern's belief in the mysterious—almost magical—properties inherent in certain orderings of the twelve chromatic pitches. In his letter, and again when he quotes the same acrostic at the end of his series of lectures 'The Path to Twelve-Note Composition', Webern does not associate it with any specific work—indeed the remark '(for orchestra)' is, as we shall see, misleading. Plates 33-37 of the sketches not only explain this remark but also show—for the first time, I believe—with what painstaking effort Webern attempted to reproduce the structure of this acrostic in the basic set of his Concerto for 9 Instruments op. 24. The very fact that this relationship has not been noticed before immediately suggests that the parallel between the two cannot be very obvious—and this is indeed the case, for reasons which the subsequent discussion will make clear. But there can be no doubt that the structure of the set was suggested at every stage by that of the acrostic.

The first notation concerned with the development of the set is a fragment of the chromatic scale (Ex. 1a). Of the eight pitches only the F♯ has a stem, and this may indicate that it was at the forefront of Webern's mind—particularly since it eventually turns out to be the first pitch of the final version of the set. Immediately this very basic idea is extended into a 12-tone set (Ex. 1b), subdivided by a bar-line into two hexachords. The first hexachord presents a modified version of the rising chromatic scale; the second inverts the direction, but not always the size, of the interval succession of the first hexachord (it would be an exact mirror

Ex. 1a



Ex. 1b



Ex. 1c



Ex. 2 40-1-1921

1. Tenor Clar. Te. mit Dpf. *p*

2. Klar. Ob. *sf ff p*

Ex. 3a



Ex. 3b



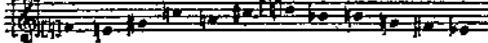
Ex. 3c



Ex. 3d



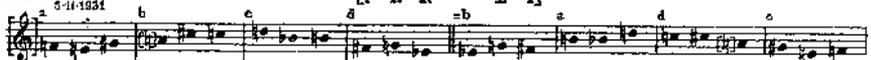
Ex. 4a 4-11-1921



Ex. 4b



Ex. 4c



UKr von b UKr von a U von b UKr von c
 Kr von c U von c Kr von a Ke von b
 U von d Kr von d UKr von d U von a

S A TOR A RE PO TE N ET OP ERA [A RE PO S A TOR OP ER A ROT A S]
 TE NET O PE RA ROT A S

if the 7th and 12th pitches were interchanged). In Ex. 1c the shaping of the set is further refined. The content of each hexachord remains the same, but the internal order of pitches is changed to generate a greater variety of intervals (a process which also seems to be reflected in the pitches written above the second hexachords of both Exx. 1b and 1c). As a result the first and last dyads of the set both form tritones, and this would allow the possibility, frequently used by Webern, of linking sets in chains by means of a common interval. In other respects, though, this set is not particularly characteristic of Webern, especially because it cannot be subdivided into symmetrically related groups of 3, 4 or 6 pitches.

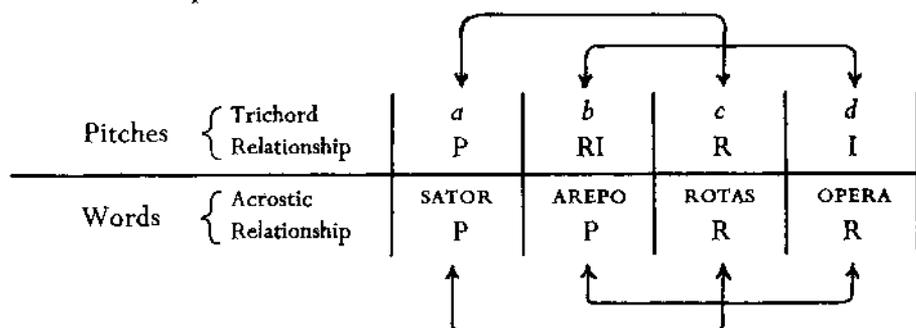
He nevertheless embarked on a composition using the set of Ex. 1c, not even incorporating the further modifications suggested by the 8 pitches above the second hexachord. It was to be an orchestral overture, which accounts for the remark '(for orchestra)' in the letter quoted above. This sketch was made in February 1931 and the letter was written the following month, but the orchestration does not definitely assume chamber-music proportions until sketches made in July 1931. It seems clear, then, that the work being referred to in the letter is definitely the one which eventually evolved into the op. 24 Concerto. The first two bars of the Overture (Ex. 2) appear in unusual detail, with all dynamics and some indications of instrumentation; but the fact that another sketch for the basic set appears further along the same system (Ex. 3a) shows that this apparently promising start was almost immediately abandoned.

Ex. 3a marks the beginning of Webern's attempts to construct a set possessing the same properties as the Latin acrostic. First he invents a 3-note motive (A-B \flat -B \sharp) which, when followed by its retrograde (B \sharp -B \flat -A), forms a pitch parallel to the non-retrogradable word TENET, which is written in above the staff. Ex. 3b, an unordered rising chromatic scale, might appear at first glance to revert to the primitive state of Ex. 1a, but closer examination reveals many hints of developments to come. It now consists of all twelve pitch-classes and sets out from the F \sharp emphasized in Ex. 1a. Furthermore it is subdivided into three 4-note groups (tetrachords), the second of which contains all the pitches used in the TENET sketch (Ex. 3a). The pitches of this tetrachord are named above the staff (a, b, h, c).¹⁰ Further along the same system is the retrograde of the chromatic scale (Ex. 3b) with the same pitch-classes written in: this time, of course, in reverse order (c, h, b, a). Obviously Webern had realized that the pitch analogue to TENET could not occur within one set, since it involves pitch-repetition, but would have to obtain between any given set and its retrograde.

Below Ex. 3c is a crucial sketch (Ex. 3d) consisting of the pitches which begin each tetrachord of both the ascending and descending chromatic scales. This is the birth of a new approach to the problem and quite probably occurred to Webern simply as a result of looking long and hard at Exx. 3b and 3c, in one of those moments when the very layout of pitches on the page suggests a particular structural possibility. The next sketch (Ex. 4a), made nearly three weeks later, is of a new twelve-tone set whose first hexachord contains the six pitches of Ex. 3d and the second the six pitches belonging to the chromatically complementary pair of augmented triads. In Ex. 4b the order of pitches 4-6 is changed and bar-lines emphasise the new trichordal (3- as opposed to the previous 4-note) structure of the set. The four trichords are labelled a, b, c and d. Under c is written 'Krebs von a' (retrograde of a) and under d 'Krebs von b'. In Ex. 4b each trichord, under the operations of the twelve-tone system, is related to only one other trichord. The re-ordering of trichords b and d in Ex. 4c means that each trichord

can now be transformed into all of the remaining three trichords.

Beneath Ex. 4c Webern first notes the relationship of each trichord to the other trichords and then writes in the words of the Latin acrostic in such a way as to reproduce, as far as is possible, the same relationship.¹¹ As I hinted before, such identity between pitches and words is only partially attainable. To begin with there is no verbal equivalent for inversion. In addition the five words of the acrostic have to be accommodated to only four trichords of the set. We have already seen that the word TENET cannot be paralleled *within* one set, and it is therefore omitted. Its palindromic structure would be reproduced if it was written over the final trichord of a set and the first trichord of its retrograde (see Ex. 4c, words above the staff).¹² Whereas the interrelationships of the trichords parallel the palindromic relationships of individual words, the use of prime and retrograde set-forms is an expression of the palindromic structure of the whole acrostic (see Ex. 4c, words below the staff).¹² The four trichords of the basic set do not themselves form an interval palindrome (ABBA) but a combination of two interlocking pairs (ABAB). The second appearance of each letter is an interval palindrome of the first. By making one change in the order of the four remaining words Webern is able to bring them into the same pattern of cross-relationships as those of the four trichords.



The word 'gilt' ('is valid') by Ex.4c indicates that this is, in fact, the final form of the set. It is as close as Webern came to reproducing the relationships of the acrostic. Although an exact parallel in every parameter is clearly out of the question, there can be no doubt that the structure of the set (which is, if one can usefully speak in such terms, musically 'perfect', and offers the tightest possible network of intervallic relationships) arose directly out of this attempt to achieve the impossible.

The next compositional sketches cover the following two sides (Plates 35 and 36), and come as something of a surprise in view of the ultimate outcome. They are all rather march-like in character, and although no tempo indications appear the time signature of \mathbb{C} suggests a fairly brisk speed. The most complete of these sketches is transcribed as Ex. 5. It bears a certain resemblance to Ex. 2, and this, together with the instrumentation (2 trumpets, horn and timpani are indicated elsewhere) suggests that these sketches were made with the idea of an orchestral overture still in mind. The only date to appear on these two pages is 6 February, 1931.

To trace the next link in this evolutionary chain we must turn back to the previous page (Plate 34) where, following the final version of the set, we find Ex.6a (dated 21 February, 1931).* Webern clearly turned back to Plate 34 in

* For Exx. 6a-f see p. 10.

Ex. 6
Op. 11-1024

Piano +
Oboe +
Clar.

Violin II

Violin,
Cello,
Tambourine

Celli Tamh.

order to sketch this new beginning on the same page as the final version of the set and then continued on Plate 37, after the intervening sketches. Ex. 6*b*, at the top of Plate 37, is dated one day later. Here Webern abandons the melody-with-accompaniment texture of Exs. 2 and 5 for a more contrapuntal treatment of the set. In the overlapping entries of the four trichords we see for the first time the kernel of what was eventually to become the opening of the Concerto op. 24. The refining of this idea can be followed through sketches 6*b* to 6*j*. They exhibit two of the main characteristics of Webern's working method. First, that he would try out his ideas in several different time-signatures—here he uses $3/8$ (Exx. 6*a*, *c*), $2/8$ (Ex. 6*b*), $3/4$ (Exx. 6*d*, *e*), $4/4$ (Exx. 6*f*, *g*) and $2/4$ (Exx. 6*h*, *i*, *j*). Second, that from sketch to sketch he would change the direction of intervals and octave displacement of each motive, exploring all its possible relationships with the rest of the material. In this sequence of sketches, for example, the first trichord appears in four different shapes and in three different registers.

Here one receives an indelible impression of how this material, which superficially appears so limited, was for Webern a source of inexhaustible musical riches. Examples 6*a-j* are the fruit of four days' work, and they are concerned solely with the arrangement of the first twelve pitches of the piece. In fact the sketches for many of the projects in this volume do not progress beyond the first set-statement, which would be abandoned only after the efforts of several days had been expended on it. Such sketches should dispel once and for all the curious notion that there was something 'mechanical' or 'mathematical' about Webern's techniques of composition. Few composers can have been more self-critical or have devoted more care to the precise shaping of their musical material. In this instance the evolution of the set itself was already a painstaking process, and Webern then embarked on what must be called a false trail (the orchestral overture) before realizing that the full potential of his set could best be realized by contrapuntally exploiting its trichordal structure.

The most significant processes taking place in Examples 6*a-j* are concerned with registral distribution and rhythm. From the registral point of view Webern's aim is to express the relationships between the four trichords as clearly as possible.¹³ In Ex. 6*a* aural confusion is generated by the use of interval inversions—trichords *a* and *d* each have a major third, which is inverted to form a minor sixth in trichords *b* and *c*. This, in conjunction with the registral distribution, emphasizes the inversional relationship between *a* and *d*, and *b* and *c*, but obscures, for example, the prime-retrograde relationship between *a/c* and *b/d*. The final pitch distribution is already established in Ex. 6*d*, but undergoes several further modifications before re-emerging in Ex. 6*j*. Here the registral distribution is very similar to that of the original set (Ex. 4*c*)—the principal difference being that the minor second is consistently expanded to a minor ninth. This simple but hard-

Ex. 6a Solo Geige pizz.
21. II. [1931]
Flöte
Celesta
Harfe

Ex. 6b 22. II. [1931] (Orch)
[1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11] [12] [13] [14] [15] [16] [17] [18] [19] [20] [21] [22] [23] [24] [25] [26] [27] [28] [29] [30] [31] [32] [33] [34] [35] [36] [37] [38] [39] [40] [41] [42] [43] [44] [45] [46] [47] [48] [49] [50] [51] [52] [53] [54] [55] [56] [57] [58] [59] [60] [61] [62] [63] [64] [65] [66] [67] [68] [69] [70] [71] [72] [73] [74] [75] [76] [77] [78] [79] [80] [81] [82] [83] [84] [85] [86] [87] [88] [89] [90] [91] [92] [93] [94] [95] [96] [97] [98] [99] [100]

Ex. 6c 3 Pos. mit Dpf.
ff

Ex. 6d 2. VII. 1931 (u. 45. Geburtstag)
1 Presto 2 3 4
Trp. m. Dpf. Harfe
[Geige] pizz.
[Flöte]

Ex. 6e Flöte
[fla] Glock. Celesta Harfe

Ex. 6f [Flöte] [fla] [Glock.] [Celesta] [Harfe]

Ex. 6g [Flöte] [fla] [Glock.] [Celesta] [Harfe]

Ex. 6h 2. VII. [1931]
Klar. Tramp. m. Dpf. Harfe Flöte

Ex. 6i Klar. Pos. mit Dpf. Harfe

Ex. 6j 1 Presto 2 Glock. 3
Harfe Mandol.
mit

I have been to Hochschwab. It was glorious: because it is not sport to me, nor amusement, but something quite different; a search for the highest, for whatever in nature corresponds to those things on which I would wish to model myself, which I would have within me. And how fruitful my trip was! The deep valleys with their mountain pines and mysterious plants—the latter have the greatest appeal for me. But not because they are so 'beautiful'. It is not the beautiful landscape, the beautiful flowers in the usual romantic sense that move me. My object is the deep, bottomless, inexhaustible meaning in all, and especially these manifestations of nature. I love all nature, but, most of all, that which is found in the mountains.¹⁵

This may surprise those who have been deceived by the vulgar opinions of popular critics, but not those who have ever responded, without prejudice, to the pure and intense poetry of Webern's vision. In his commentary Krenek must echo the feelings of many when he writes, apropos the Saxophone Quartet: 'It affords this writer a certain satisfaction that he, without knowing any of Webern's private sketches, even more than thirty years ago, when Webern's detractors accused him of being a cold cerebralist reducing music to meaningless calculations, expressed the opinion that his music evoked the image of the tense stillness of the highest mountain peaks.'

To be continued in TEMPO 113.
Material relating to Webern's op. 24 quoted by kind permission of
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NOTES

1. Smalley, Roger: 'The Sketchbook of The Rite of Spring'. TEMPO 91, Winter 1969-70, pp. 2-13.
2. Anton von Webern: *Sketches (1926-1945). Facsimile reproductions from the composer's autograph sketches in the Moldenhauer Archive.* Carl Fischer Inc., New York 1968.
3. Moldenhauer, Hans: 'A Webern Pilgrimage'. *The Musical Times*, No. 1500, February 1968, pp. 122-127.
4. This *Kinderstück* has been published by Boosey and Hawkes, and one of the string trios (it is not clear which) by Universal Edition (UE 13019).
5. For a complete catalogue of the Webern Archive see 'A Webern Archive in America' by Hans Moldenhauer, in *Anton von Webern: Perspectives*, ed. Demar Irvine (University of Washington Press, 1966), pp. 117-166. In his introduction to this catalogue Moldenhauer does not make it clear where all these sketchbooks came from. The sixth sketchbook was presented to the Archive in 1961 by Mrs. Amalie Waller, Webern's eldest daughter; the other four were only 'unearthed' by 'the momentum of these endeavours' (to gather as much additional material as possible). At the time of publication of the present volume of sketches, the Archive was in the University of Washington.
6. Krenek, Ernst: 'The Same Stone Which The Builders Refused Is Become The Headstone Of The Corner'. *Die Reihe*, Vol. 2, p. 12.
7. The sketches for a projected third movement for the Symphony op. 20 (Plates 9-11) have been transcribed and discussed in some detail by Heinrich Deppert in his 'Studien zur Kompositionstechnik im instrumentalen Spätwerk Anton Weberns'. Edition Tonos (Darmstadt, Ahastrasse 7) 1972, pp. 178-187. The contents of the final pages of the sixth and last sketchbook (Plates 41-47) are described by Hans Moldenhauer in his article 'Webern's projected Op. 32', *Musical Times*, No. 1530, August 1970, pp. 789-792.
8. Extract from Webern's letter to Hildegard Jone dated 11.3.1931, in Webern, Anton: *Letters to Hildegard Jone and Josef Humplik.* Theodore Presser Co. and Universal Edition, 1967, p. 17 (letter 22).
9. Webern, Anton: *The Path to the New Music.* Theodore Presser Co. and Universal Edition, 1963, p. 56. In this book the same acrostic is translated as 'The sower Arepo keeps the work circling'.
10. German H = English B♭; German B = English B♭.
11. U = Umkehrung = Inversion; Kr = Krebs = Retrograde; U Kr = Umkehrung Krebs = Retrograde Inversion.
12. The words in square brackets have been added by the author.
13. 'The ultimate principle in the presentation of a musical thought is comprehensibility'. Webern, quoted in *Die Reihe*, Vol. 2, p. 21.
14. Stockhausen's article 'Webern's Konzert für Neun Instrumente Op. 24', first published in 1953 and reprinted in Karlheinz Stockhausen: *Texte*, Vol. 1 (Du Mont Schauberg, 1963), pp. 24-31, contains much interesting speculation on the relationship between pitch and rhythm in this work.
15. Extract from Webern's letter to Alban Berg dated 1.8.1919. *Die Reihe* Vol. 2, p. 17.