

Webern's Op. 12, No. 2, "Die Geheimnisvolle Flöte": Pitch Orthography, Text Setting, and Form

ABSTRACT

Background

The absent repetitions of musical themes and verses in the poem suggest that Webern's Op. 12, No. 2, "Die Geheimnisvolle Flöte," is through composed. However, several gestures create what Morgan (1991, 82) would likely refer to as the "faint suggestions of reprise," hinting the song being reminiscent of a more typical ternary form ABA'. Ex. 1 shows how the last vocal phrase recaptures the six essential features in the opening vocal phrase, potentially implying the reprise process and thus alluding the song's form of ABA'.

Feature (1): The similarity of the textual structure

Feature (2): The same pitch G at the beginning of each phrase

Feature (3): The same dynamics p

Feature (4): Similar rhythmic pattern

Feature (5): A similar intervallic pattern stresses on the text "Abend"

Feature (6): sc 3-1 and the inversionally related accidentals

Ex. 1. The six features implying the faint suggestions of reprise.

Features (1)–(4) are straightforward—a similar textual structure with the same beginning pitch G articulated by the dynamics *p*, which are superimposed on a similar rhythmic pattern. In (5), Webern sets "Abend" on a large leap prepared by an ascending whole tone in both phrases. Feature (6) shows that all the accidentals are "inversionally" related around the natural sign. The last feature leads me to speculate that perhaps Webern plans unique systems to spell the twelve chromatic notes and applies his pitch orthography to articulate musical form and text setting.

Aims and repertoire studied

Although text setting and musical form are the major concerns in the current analytical literature of Webern's songs (Griffiths 1997, Forte 1998, and Sanford 2014, among others), incorporating these issues with the subject of pitch orthography remains untouched. This presentation brings the significance of pitch notation into sharper focus by studying its crucial role in the course of the form and text setting in the vocal line of Webern's Op. 12, No. 2.

Method

Ex. 2 suggests three types of spelling systems that summarize how Webern notates his twelve chromatic pitches. The first two are ascending chromatic scales (A-1/A-2), and each one exclusively contains either flat or sharp signs. The pitches in type B are organized by a sequence of ascending fifths, which include two flats and three sharps. These three types A-1, A-2, and B pitch orthography serve loosely as what most theorists term *referential collections* (Bass [1994] and Cook [2012]). But, unlike the conventional sense indicating a large pitch-class collection from which a subset may spring, here Ex. 2 represents the orthographical sources to which a discrete segmentation orients.

Ex. 2. Three types of pitch orthography notating the twelve chromatic notes.

Implications

My findings suggest that the three formal parts are based on the verses in the poem, and Webern uses different types of pitch notation to highlight the details of the textual structures within each part. These include the entrances of the keywords

and main subject of the poem, the consistency of flat signs set on the verbs throughout the song, and the large-scale textual structure of the verse. They also musically reflect and coincide with the change of dynamics, pitch contour, and phrasal slurs. Moreover, the orthographical materials in Part I recur in Part III, while those in Part II are set on a footing of a different note spelling system. This further strengthens the underlying formal outline of ABA' superficially implied by the six "faint suggestions of reprise" shown previously in Ex. 1.

Keywords

Pitch Orthography, Musical Form, Text Setting, Webern, Atonal Music

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