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Schoenberg and the Film City: A Look From the Mid-2020s*

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The article explores the pivotal moments, significant encounters, and lasting influences in the life of Austrian modernist composer Arnold Schoenberg, who spent his final 17 years in Los Angeles after fleeing Hitler's Europe with his family in 1933. As the United States' film capital and a city featured by the technological advancements of sound in cinema at that period, Los Angeles attracted numerous musicians, including émigrés like Schoenberg. However, it also set limits on their professional aspirations. The article delves into Schoenberg's legacy in the city and the efforts to preserve his memory within this cultural landscape. Through uncovering little-known, forgotten, or newly discovered facts about Schoenberg's life, it reconstructs the vibrant cultural scene of early 20th-century Vienna and, more importantly, Los Angeles during the 1930s. The article also highlights the pedagogical aspect of Schoenberg's activities, offering a holistic view of his multifaceted personality as a composer, artist, and teacher.

Keywords: Schoenberg, Kandinsky, Alma Mahler, Los Angeles, Gershwin, Hollywood, Arnold Schoenberg Institute

Introduction

Theoretical Framework

The scholarship on the life and work of Arnold Schoenberg is as varied and vibrant as the fields of study in which it is found: music theory, art, anthropology, history, social studies, etc. A collection of essays—the composer's own theoretical pronouncements and, mostly, short articles about him (Armitage, 1937)—appears to be the earliest tribute to Schoenberg on American soil, occupying a status somewhere between academic work and "guild endorsement" for a newcomer to the United States. Declared "degenerate music" and treated as "cultural bolshevism" in his homeland in the late 1930s (Evans, 2010, p. 191), Schoenberg's music was actually excluded from both performance practice and theoretical analysis in Europe for about two decades. Interest in Schoenberg's innovations matured in America (and re-emerged in Europe) only in the 1960s. An example of this is Payne's 61-page book (1968), devoted to a biography of the composer ("background") and an overview of several of his early compositions, as well as examples of serial/twelve-tone technique. The first comprehensive treatment of Schoenberg as an artist from various perspectives is presented in the multi-author book project (Stein & Kravitz, 1978), published by the Arnold Schoenberg Institute shortly after its establishment at the University of Southern California. Publications from the 1990s shed light on the composer's early works (notably Frisch, 1993), presenting, a detailed survey of Schoenberg's early tonal music, which music historians and theorists tend to ignore as an intermediate stage on the way to his mature, i.e. atonal, style.

The time for discussion of issues related to the immigration of European Jewish musicians to the United

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States will come in the first decade of the millennium (Bahr, 2007; Crawford, 2009). This period is also marked by scholarly interest in Schoenberg's years in Los Angeles and his relationship with the religion of his ancestors, Judaism, from which he was separated for some three and a half decades (Neff, 2002; Crawford, 2002; Marcus, 2007). In his doctoral dissertation (2011), Koffer examines the delicate topic of the relationships between Schoenberg, the artist Richard Gerstl, and Schoenberg's wife Mathilde, events that directly influenced the composer's style for many years to come.

By the end of the second decade of the century, publications on Schoenberg's early circle (Muxeneder, 2018), as well as collections of his correspondence with Alma Mahler (Keathley & McCoy, 2019) and American composers (Feisst, 2018) have provided significant insight into the scope of Schoenberg's professional and personal communications over many years and across continents. Among the most recent publications, Sachs's book (2023) is a remarkable analytical review of the meaning and place of Schoenberg's creative legacy and personality.

Research Design and Methods

In revisiting the life of Arnold Schoenberg, present study brings into focus his diverse talents and the significance of his family life in shaping key transformations in his musical language. It also underscores the broader experience of Austrian and German Jewish intellectuals and artists who, displaced by Nazi regime in the 1930s, sought safety in the United States, with Los Angeles becoming a new home for many (Bahr, 2007; Crawford, 2009). By bringing lesser-known facts to light, the article restores the cultural atmosphere of both Vienna and Los Angeles during these periods, exploring Schoenberg's relationships with notable figures such as Alexander Zemlinsky, Wassily Kandinsky, Alma Mahler, and George Gershwin. Furthermore, it touches on the efforts to preserve Schoenberg's memory after his death, opening new research tropes on the academic handling of his legacy in Los Angeles—an area that remains largely unexplored.

The study also highlights the gradual release of previously restricted archival materials—available now due to the 70-year mark since Schoenberg's death—including information about Schoenberg's family, his burial, and the Arnold Schoenberg Institute at the University of Southern California. Materials gathered during the author's visits to USC and UCLA in 2023 and 2024 provide access to unique documents and period testimonies.

The study suggests a reevaluation of the impact that the wave of Nazi-era émigré composers had on American classical and film music. Schoenberg stands out as a special case—an immensely influential figure whose work, though rarely performed, has been extensively studied. This investigation has unveiled layers of his life and the broader contexts in which he lived, highlighting the intersections of pedagogy, anthropology, and socio-cultural history.

Rather than focusing strictly on musicological analysis, the study emphasizes the social and cultural dynamics that shaped Schoenberg's career, reflecting on his artistic and educational contributions. The narrative, a sequence of findings, is divided into three parts and follows a chronological approach, tracing Schoenberg's early years in Vienna (Findings I, based on an analysis of published sources) through his life in Los Angeles, and then examining how his legacy has been remembered and maintained posthumously (Findings II and III respectively, based on both published sources and unpublished materials from the USC and UCLA libraries, as well as on-site discoveries).

Thus, the research method of this study combines library work with sources (including those unavailable elsewhere or in digital form) with field research, that is, observations and interviews with people who have been

direct participants or functionaries of the events and organizations described in the article and, hence, living carriers of local memory.

Facts, details, and any data that appear in more than two of the published sources mentioned above and/or listed in the References section are not given with a specific reference and are considered to be generally known. Facts available from only one published source are provided with a reference to that source. If an additional source exists from on-site ethnography or from a bibliographic/archive/library special collections source not widely available, it is added to corroborate the detail. The study (and this article that summarizes it) can thus be seen as a view of the subject corresponding to the time it was conducted/written, that is, the mid-2020s.

Findings I: The Viennese Years

Early Circles and Family Ties

Born in 1874 in Vienna's Jewish district of Leopoldstadt, Arnold Schoenberg embodied from an early age the complex interplay of music and the visual arts. His artistic inclinations oscillated between these two realms, with private studies in both painting and music delaying a definitive choice of profession. This initial hesitancy was largely offset by his commitment to innovation throughout his further career.

During his formative years in Vienna, Schoenberg was embedded in multiple artistic and intellectual circles. His most renowned association, the Second Viennese School, positioned him as a central theorist alongside figures like Alban Berg and Anton Webern. However, prior to this, another, lesser-known circle deeply influenced him—*Jung-Wien* (Young Vienna). Emerging in the late 1890s, this group was initially shaped by composer Alexander Zemlinsky, who led what was called the Jung-Wien Musical Art or the Jung-Wien School. By the early 20th century, Schoenberg himself had ascended as a key figure, often referred to as the "captain" of this movement alongside Zemlinsky (Muxeneder, 2018, p. 159).

The relationship between Zemlinsky and Schoenberg (Figure 1) transcended mere mentorship in composition and theory. The bond was further solidified when Schoenberg married Zemlinsky's sister, uniting the two in familial ties as well as artistic endeavors.

Figure 1. Alexander Zemlinsky (left) and Arnold Schoenberg in Prague, 1917.[1]

[1] Figures 1-4 are reproduced under fair use.

Other notable members of this early circle included Bruno Walter, a conductor-in-the-making and former student of Gustav Mahler, who—like Schoenberg—was wrestling with the decision to pursue composition or conducting. Their careers, once centered in Vienna, would lead both Schoenberg and Walter to far-flung destinations, with Los Angeles becoming a shared home for the two in later decades.

Several members of the *Jung-Wien* circle were of Jewish descent, a reflection of the evolving intellectual and cultural milieu of Vienna at the turn of the century. As was common in Europe at the time, some chose to convert to Christianity, particularly Lutheranism, seeking to integrate more fully into the broader societal fabric. This trend can be traced back to the decree on tolerance issued by Emperor Joseph II in 1782, which allowed limited Jewish settlement in Vienna. By the late 19th century, the descendants of these Jewish settlers had become integral to the city's intellectual and artistic spheres.

Religion and national identity were certainly among the subjects of lively debate in these circles. As Muxeneder (2018) notes, the growing tide of anti-Semitic propaganda deeply troubled young Jewish intellectuals, many of whom felt alienated regardless of their conversion. For some, like Schoenberg, conversion was not merely an act of social assimilation, but a means to gain deeper access to European cultural traditions, which were closely intertwined with Christian heritage.

Musically, the members of *Jung-Wien*, like some others close to the circle, such as Richard Strauss, adhered to the idea of the *Tonpoeme* (or *Ton-Poeme*), a form that closely mirrors the symphonic poem. These compositions—often inspired by literary works—were akin to symphonic movements, using instrumental music to convey poetic or artistic narratives. Schoenberg's early masterpiece *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night), for example, was inspired by Richard Dehmel's poem of the same name, but also drew heavily on the personal and emotional resonance of Schoenberg's relationship with Mathilde Zemlinsky, whom he married in 1901.

Mathilde Schoenberg, who significantly contributed to the financial stability of her family, also played an unexpected role in the transformative shift in 20th-century music. If the first key milestone in Schoenberg's early output was the string sextet *Verklärte Nacht* (*1899*), the second pivotal moment came a decade later under far more personal and tumultuous circumstances. In 1908, Richard Gerstl, a talented yet then-unknown painter, entered the Schoenberg household, living with the family and engaging Schoenberg in the practice and discussion of new artistic methods (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The Schoenberg Family (1908) by Richard Gerstl.

Although this paper does not delve into the details of this story, which have been comprehensively explored in a recent academic study (Coffer, 2011), it is essential to note the aftermath: at the urging of close friends like Anton Webern, Mathilde eventually returned to her husband. Tragically, Gerstl, spurned by the couple's inner circle, took his own life shortly after. This period of personal crisis marked a significant turning point in Schoenberg's musical development. His music runs to abandon the tonal framework, though elements of late Romantic harmony remain for some time. The most notable work from this time is his *Second String Quartet* (1908), a composition often cited as his first atonal work. The third and fourth movements incorporate a soprano voice, while the final movement is remarkable for its complete absence of a discernible key, reflecting Schoenberg's emotional turmoil. The quartet is dedicated "to my wife", encapsulating the composer's profound sense of instability during this period. By this time, Schoenberg had also embarked on a series that would eventually grow into more than 70 self-portraits, starting with highly realistic depictions before moving toward more expressionist forms, reflecting the intense emotions of this most transformative decade in his life (Figure 3).

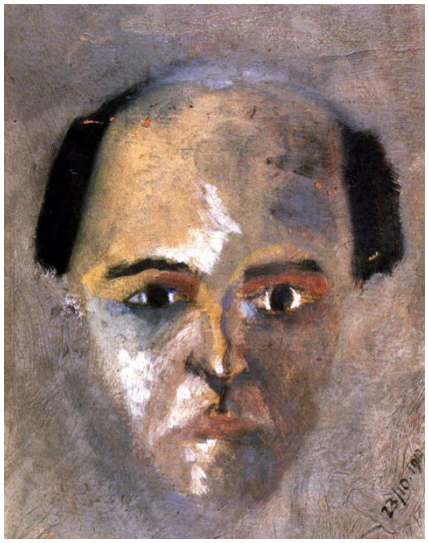

Figure 3. Schoenberg's self-portrait (1910).

Looking forward, it becomes clear that the next seismic shift in Schoenberg's compositional style, his adoption of dodecaphony—or the twelve-tone technique—emerged shortly after Mathilde's death in 1923. His *Piano Suite Op. 25*, completed that same year, stands as his first fully dodecaphonic work, symbolizing a structured response to emotional loss. Notably, Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositions are devoid of the typical emotional gestures—such as crying, joy, or questioning—that were often hallmarks of his earlier, more expressive music. When Schoenberg sought to convey specific emotions later in his career, he would return to his earlier atonal or even tonal techniques, as if the twelve-tone method represented a more detached, formalized process for him.

Kandinsky and Alma Mahler

Schoenberg's break from tonality did not escape the attention of another avant-garde visionary, Wassily Kandinsky, who was making waves in the European art world with his revolutionary approach to painting. Born in Moscow in 1866, Kandinsky initially pursued a path far removed from the arts, studying law and

economics at Moscow University. Offered a prestigious position as professor of Roman law at what is now the University of Tartu, Estonia, Kandinsky abandoned his legal career at the age of 30 to study painting, enrolling in Munich's Academy of Fine Arts. By the early 1910s, Kandinsky had begun traveling across Central Europe, and it was during one such journey to Vienna that he encountered an advertisement for a concert that would prove pivotal in his artistic development: a performance of Schoenberg's *Second String Quartet*, which featured a soprano voice. The concert profoundly impacted Kandinsky, inspiring his famous painting *Impression III, Concert* which captured his growing departure from realism and foreshadowed his later move toward abstractionism.

What else linked these two groundbreaking figures? Both men experienced a form of cultural and spiritual outsiderness. Kandinsky, born into the Russian Orthodox faith, eventually embraced Theosophy, influenced by Madame Blavatsky's teachings. Similarly, Schoenberg, though born Jewish, had converted to Lutheranism—a notable commonality, especially in predominantly Catholic Vienna, which perhaps deepened their bond.

Their correspondence reveals a gradual deepening of intellectual and personal trust, culminating in 1923 when Kandinsky, by then a professor at the Bauhaus school of design in Weimar, invited Schoenberg to join the faculty. Kandinsky's invitation came with a caveat: though Jews were generally not welcomed at the Bauhaus, an exception could be made for Schoenberg. The composer, however, refused the offer in no uncertain terms, stating that he would not accept being treated as an exception among a generally maligned group (Hahl-Koch, 1984, p. 79, 82). This episode illuminated Schoenberg's increasing sensitivity to the rise of anti-Semitism, even within seemingly progressive circles. His wariness had been heightened by a disturbing incident a few months earlier when he was forced to leave the summer resort at Mattsee, near Salzburg, due to anti-Semitic hostility. As Schoenberg confided to his student Alban Berg, "[t]oward the end it got very ugly in Mattsee. The people there seemed to despise me as much as if they knew my music" (Auner, 2003, p. 159).

Though Schoenberg and Kandinsky eventually resumed cordial relations, the warmth of their earlier connection never fully returned. Kandinsky, however, was not the only non-Jewish confidant with whom Schoenberg shared his concerns over rising anti-Semitism. His correspondence with Alma Mahler, widow of Gustav Mahler, spanned nearly five decades, during which they frequently discussed the growing prejudice in Austria and beyond.

Schoenberg likely first became acquainted with Alma Schindler in 1900, when both were composition students under the tutelage of Alexander Zemlinsky. At the time, Alma had a brief and secret romantic relationship with Zemlinsky, though this ended when, about a year and a half later, she married Gustav Mahler. At 22, Alma entered into this marriage with a man two decades older than her, and as was customary in that era, she set aside her own musical aspirations to support her husband's career. This traditional view of a woman's role was one shared not only by Mahler, whose values were shaped in the 19th century, but also by Alma's parents, who endorsed such conventions.

Throughout her life, Alma Mahler was married three times—after Mahler's death, to architect Walter Gropius and later to playwright Franz Werfel. Yet, despite her evolving personal circumstances, she maintained a deep, candid correspondence with Schoenberg. Their letters, which began in Vienna, spanned decades and continents, continuing into their later years when both had settled in Los Angeles. Alma, having been intimately familiar with the leadership of the Bauhaus through her second husband Gropius, who founded the institution,

provided Schoenberg with insights during the 1923 events involving Kandinsky and the Bauhaus's stance on Jewish members. Alma advised Schoenberg to consider Kandinsky's actions through the lens of their friendship, urging him to forgive a man who sincerely tried to navigate a challenging situation while maintaining his respect for Schoenberg amidst the prevailing political climate (Keathley & McCoy, 2019, p. 291).

The circle of friends shared by Schoenberg and Alma Mahler represented the true artistic elite of the early 20th century, including Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, and Egon Schiele. Schiele, in particular, immortalized Schoenberg in a famous portrait painted in 1917, marking an enduring connection between the worlds of music and visual art.

Alma and Gustav Mahler's daughter, Anna Mahler, maintained close ties with both her mother and the Schoenberg family, even as her life oscillated between London and the United States after the war. In 1951, while visiting Los Angeles at the time of Schoenberg's death, Anna created a death mask of the composer, a final, intimate gesture connecting the two families in the closing chapter of Schoenberg's life.

Findings II: American Experience

Gershwin

After returning to Judaism in Paris, Schoenberg's arrival in the United States in 1933 marked a significant transition in both his personal and professional life. This act, as Marcus (2007) states, "not only separated his European period from his American period but also had a direct impact on his compositions" (p. 307). Schoenberg now sought to position himself less as a European modernist and more as a composer seeking to integrate into the fabric of American musical culture.

In addition to his ongoing correspondence with American composers, Schoenberg had to make efforts to maintain and rebuild relationships within the unique German-Austrian-Jewish community of émigrés. Some connections strengthened, while others frayed. His relationship with fellow composer Ernest Bloch, who had moved to the US earlier, illustrates this dynamic. Initially, Bloch warmly welcomed Schoenberg's arrival, but tensions soon arose as Bloch perceived Schoenberg's growing prominence in America as a threat to his own position as a leading European composer (Feisst, 2018, pp. 65-67). Another challenge Schoenberg faced was the resistance to modern music in Los Angeles, a city less receptive to his modernist ideas than European capitals, which required adaptability that Schoenberg sometimes struggled to muster (Crawford, 2002).

In an effort to find his footing, Schoenberg initially spent a year trying to settle in Boston before relocating to Los Angeles, where he encountered George Gershwin, who was then living in Hollywood. Their connection had begun nearly a decade earlier when Gershwin, on a concert tour in Europe, sought composition lessons from Schoenberg. Schoenberg famously declined, remarking, "I would only make you a bad Schoenberg, and you are such a good Gershwin already!" (Lewis, 2010, p. 287). Upon reuniting in America, the two composers quickly developed a mutual admiration. They socialized, played tennis, and even collaborated artistically—Gershwin painted a portrait of Schoenberg (Figure 4) and tried to promote Schoenberg's music as much as he could, while Schoenberg, in turn, expressed sincere admiration for Gershwin's artistry, describing him as an artist and a composer who expressed musical ideas that "were new, as is the way he expressed them" (Getman, 2019, p. 49).

Figure 4. A photograph of George Gershwin Painting Arnold Schoenberg (1936).

Unfortunately, their burgeoning friendship was cut short by Gershwin's untimely death in 1937 following unsuccessful surgery for a brain tumor. Deeply affected, Schoenberg delivered an emotional eulogy the day after Gershwin's passing, mourning not only the loss to the world of music but also the loss of a dear friend.

Hollywood

Schoenberg's early efforts to establish himself in Los Angeles involved conducting his own compositions alongside works by other composers. He found support in Otto Klemperer, a fellow émigré and conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, who helped organize several concerts. However, since the reception to these performances was tepid, Schoenberg quickly realized that "his twelve-tone music would not fare well in musically unsophisticated Los Angeles" (Crawford, 2009, p. 104).

As the hub of the burgeoning film industry, particularly in Hollywood, Los Angeles cultivated a musical culture that prioritized broad appeal over modernist experimentation. The dominant trend in the 1930s was to encourage serious composers to work in film, and Schoenberg was no exception to this pressure. According to Salka Viertel, a screenwriter at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Irving Thalberg, a prominent MGM producer, approached Schoenberg to compose the score for a film adaptation of *The Good Earth*, Pearl Buck's acclaimed novel about rural China (Viertel, 1969, pp. 207-208). Schoenberg was offered a substantial sum of $30,000 for the project. However, he made an unusual demand: complete control over all aspects of the film's sound, including the spoken dialogue. This was unacceptable to the producer. Furthermore, Schoenberg's wife, Gertrude, raised the fee to $50,000, an unprecedented figure for the time. As a result, the negotiations collapsed. Reflecting on the missed opportunity, Schoenberg, although he admitted to Alma Mahler that accepting the project "would have been the end of me" (Crawford, 2009, p. 115), later confessed to his wife that he regretted not having taken a contract that could have provided financial security to focus on unfinished compositions and theoretical work.

Realizing that conducting and film scoring would not provide a sustainable income, Schoenberg began to consider teaching, particularly at the university level, as a more stable professional avenue. This shift ultimately became central to his American career, allowing him to continue composing while influencing a new generation of musicians.

Findings III: Post-human Stories

Academic Commemoration

It was by no means guaranteed that a 60-year-old European modernist composer could secure a teaching position in quite a traditional academic environment of 1930s America, particularly in Los Angeles. Yet, Arnold Schoenberg managed to do just that, accepting professorships in music theory and composition at two of the city's leading universities—first at the University of Southern California (USC), and later at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where he taught for a total of eight years.

Schoenberg's presence at UCLA does not look understated and is respectfully preserved. The university's School of Music features a concert hall and a building named in his honor, with a Schiele portrait of Schoenberg, a bust sculpted by Louis Zack, and an enlarged facsimile of his *Kol Nidre* (1938), displayed next to the Music Library. Unique documents housed in the university's Special Collections, including Schoenberg's résumé in UCLA format, his meticulously handwritten lecture notes (Figure 5), and student compositions annotated by the composer, offer a rare glimpse into his academic life from 1936 until his retirement in 1944, at the age of 70. However, as UCLA Special Collections librarians note, much of this material remains unclaimed.

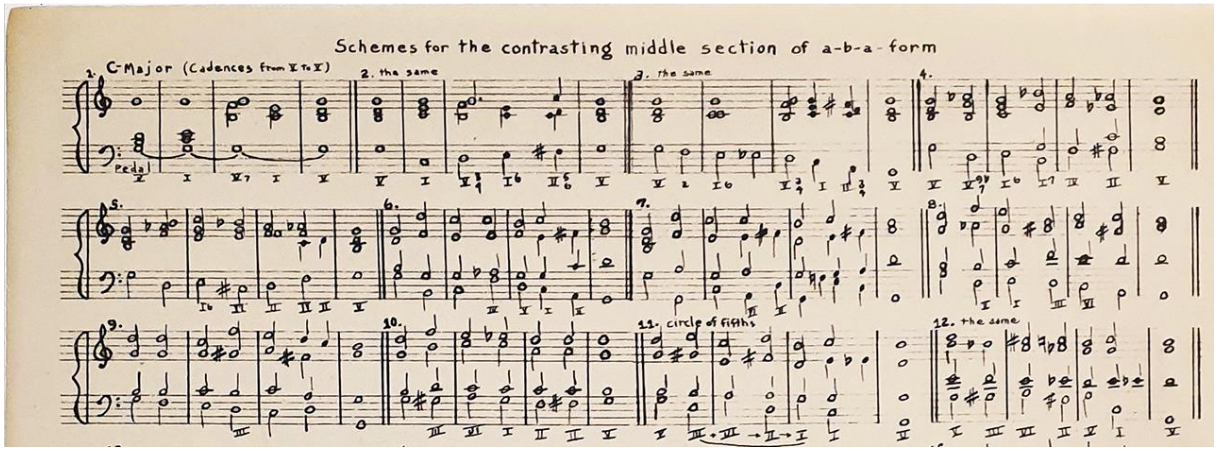

Figure 5. Schoenberg's examples for lectures, 1936. Courtesy: UCLA Library Special Collections.

The University of Southern California, for its part, has taken more active steps to perpetuate Schoenberg's legacy, notably through the creation of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute. In the early 1970s, negotiations began with Schoenberg's heirs to transfer his archives to USC for preservation and study. The Institute's Expressionist-style building, designed by Adrian Wilson Associates and completed in 1977, bore echoes of the Bauhaus movement, reflecting Schoenberg's modernist aesthetics (Figure 6).

The Institute was intended to be a center for the study and performance of Schoenberg's works. For two decades, the Institute published a journal (Arnold Schoenberg Institute, 1976-1996). For a variety of reasons, the most important of which was the unsatisfactory—in the eyes of the composer's heirs—promoting the music of Arnold Schoenberg in concerts held in the Institute's chamber concert hall (Arnold Schoenberg Institute, 1982; Gordon, 1995), the organization was forced to hand over the composer's archives back to the family, whereupon they moved to the Schoenberg Center, which opened in Vienna. The Institute building, adapted then for the needs of the USC School of Music (PCR Services Corporation, 2009), stood for about a decade and was eventually torn down, making way for the university's School of Cinematic Arts (Evidence on the spot).

Artistic Flashbacks

The next significant tribute to Schoenberg on the USC campus came in 2015 with the creation of a sound installation titled *Schoenberg Soundways*, conceived and embodied by Los Angeles-based artist David Schafer. The installation involved five USC utility trucks, each outfitted with speakers that played different works by Schoenberg spanning various periods and styles of his musical vision, over the course of a week (Norton, 2015). Each truck displayed banners indicating the piece being played and the year it was composed, creating a mobile, campus-wide experience of Schoenberg's music (Figure 7).

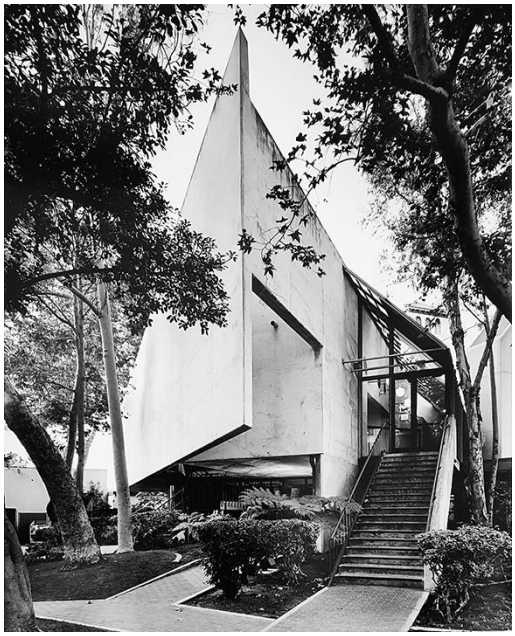

Figure 6. Arnold Schoenberg Institute, USC, c. 1985. Courtesy: USC Music Library.

Figure 7. Schoenberg Soundways on the USC campus, 2015. Courtesy: David Schafer.

Schafer's installation was inspired by the concept of *indeterminacy*, a term coined by John Cage, one of Schoenberg's students. Indeterminacy refers to the capacity of a work to be realized in multiple, unpredictable forms. In this case, the crisscrossing trucks, playing Schoenberg's compositions in random combinations,

embodied this idea by juxtaposing diverse musical styles in unpredictable ways. Schafer described this as "ghosting history", a means of reviving Schoenberg's presence on a campus that once housed both the composer and his archives (Audio-recorded conversation with D. Shafer, August 24, 2023). In a statement that echoed the thoughtful nature of the installation, the artist called it "a historical recovery project" (Norton, 2015). The project culminated with a performance by USC Thornton School of Music students, who played several of Schoenberg's works (Concert poster kept by D. Schafer).

Soundways was Schafer's second tribute to Schoenberg. In 2013, he created *Four Letters to Mahler*, another sound installation that featured English translations of four letters Schoenberg had written to Gustav Mahler. The letters were broadcast through eight speakers, layering audio-recorded excerpts in English with German accent, offering a multi-dimensional homage to Schoenberg's close correspondence with another iconic composer (Conversation with D. Shafer).

Together, these two projects—*Four Letters to Mahler* in 2013 and *Schoenberg Soundways* in 2015—stand out as some of the most innovative artistic commemorations of Schoenberg in Los Angeles since his tenure at USC and the establishment of the Schoenberg Institute.

Discussion and Conclusion

To summarize the above, let's try to briefly outline what the state of classical music is in Los Angeles today, and how Schoenberg's legacy fits into this landscape, if at all.

In one of his later letters, Schoenberg remarked, "If immigration to America has changed me—I am not aware of it" (Crawford, 2002, p. 34). His eventual burial further underscores this transatlantic duality. As revealed by E. Randol Schoenberg, the composer's grandson, although Arnold Schoenberg passed away in Los Angeles in 1951, he was not laid to rest there. His ashes were kept for more than two decades before being interred in an honorary grave in Vienna's Zentralfriedhof in 1974 (Schoenberg, 2021). This transfer of Schoenberg's remains to Vienna seemingly foreshadowed the eventual relocation of his archives, which were moved from USC to the Schoenberg Center in Vienna in 1998.

The decline of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute at USC cannot be attributed solely to a breach of contract with the composer's heirs. More fundamentally, it reflected a deeper cultural clash between two modernist traditions: American avant-garde, which pushed boundaries with radical approaches to form, instrumentation, and even silence (I am hinting, of course, to Cage's *4′33″*), and the Austrian-German modernism of Schoenberg's time, which primarily sought to challenge the tonal system while maintaining more conventional forms. As the 20th century progressed, American musical tastes were shaped by homegrown genres like jazz, country, and rock "n" roll, leaving European modernism largely out of sync with popular American audiences.

Even today, this divide remains noticeable. When tuning into KUSC, Los Angeles' classical music station, one might observe that the repertoire remains predominantly within the Baroque to mid-Romantic periods, emphasizing tonal music that concludes with a clear tonic triad. Apart from rare nods to Gershwin or Copland, there is little sign of the kind of modernist experimentation that Schoenberg championed.

A recent event at the Hollywood Bowl (on August 30, 2024), reflects this trend. Directed by Gustavo Dudamel, the LA Philharmonic presented *Marvel Studios' Infinity Saga Concert Experience*, blending live orchestral music with cinematic elements. This multi-genre show featured live orchestra, choir, soloists, and dazzling visual effects that were reminiscent of Scriabin's *Mysterium*, without a clear plot line. While the music was performed live, it largely served an accompanying role to the visual spectacle, its presence was easily

overshadowed by the audiovisual immersion (Field notes, August 30, 2024, Los Angeles). This kind of postmodern presentation—highly polished and entertainment-focused—illustrates the dominance of popular culture and spectacle over the more abstract and intellectually demanding strains of classical modernism that Schoenberg represented.

And yet, Schoenberg's time in America was not without impact. R. Wayne Shoaf, a former archivist of the Schoenberg Institute, argued that the Institute achieved its goal of introducing American audiences to the music of major European modernist composers, providing them with the highest quality performances available (Zoom-conversation with R. W. Shoaf, August 17, 2023). The closure of the Institute and the transfer of the archives to Vienna signal the end of a chapter, but the legacy of European émigré composers and their influence on Los Angeles' musical landscape in the 1930s remains a subject worthy of further exploration. Institutions like UCLA and USC, where Schoenberg once taught, still hold important archival materials, offering future researchers the opportunity to examine how these European intellectual migrations shaped the broader currents of American music.

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