

NOTES ON A MEETING WITH RICHARD HOFFMANN
Tuesday 23rd November 2004 at Paddington Court Hotel, London.

I spent a delightful morning (and lunch) with this charming gentleman, one of the last surviving pupils of Schoenberg, also his Co-Editor (with Leonard Stein) and later, full-time Secretary. He related many anecdotes, all highly entertaining and some quite racy! Much of the information will be more relevant to a later volume (on the 'legacy' of Pierrot Lunaire).

Schoenberg was in his early 70s when they met in 1947. Hoffmann, a violinist, was related to Schoenberg by marriage: the violinist Rudolf Kolisch, Schoenberg's brother-in-law was his cousin, and it was Kolisch's sister Trude (Gertrud) who became Schoenberg's second wife in 1924.

Hoffmann's lessons with Schoenberg were on Tuesdays and Fridays, from 3.30 to 4.30 pm. (Of other students of the master he said that John Cage had only a few lessons with Schoenberg and 'totally misunderstood everything he said'.)

On PIERROT LUNAIRE, he asserted that its declamatory style was derived primarily from melodrama. The composer did not like the work to be acted out with gesture and movement. He said to Hoffmann that he wanted the soft passages to be 'like a prayer'. He felt that 'Rote Messe' (no. 11) was a Black Mass, and he imagined it written in white letters. When the composer conducted the work himself, for the recording in 1940, he had to join the American Composers Union. The recording was also filmed (the film is now in the Arnold Schoenberg Center in Vienna) and Hoffmann says that Wagner's husband, Fritz Stiedry was also conducting, out of shot, behind the composer, keeping the performance under control! Erika Wagner's glissandi were apparently approved of by Schoenberg. He did indeed envisage Pierrot being eventually performed without conductor, and pitched accurately throughout.

Hoffmann said Schoenberg would not have minded a male vocalist taking on the piece, but that the voice for *A Survivor from Warsaw* must be male. The fact that the commissioner of Pierrot, Albertine Zehme, was female, decided things (Albertine Zehme's husband actually paid the commission fee.) Schoenberg's preferred English translation was that by Carl Beier and Ingolf Dahl (the latter using the pseudonym of 'Wachtel').

Finally, some more amusing nuggets of information (not all of them relating to the subject in hand, but affording some unexpected insights): –

Schoenberg knew and liked Bartok's music, but he loved Max Reger's work especially (Hoffmann hinted that he perhaps found it easier to appreciate composers who were already dead!)

Schoenberg referred to Vaughan Williams as 'Von Wilhelms', and thought Sibelius a bad orchestrator!

He loved Bach, Puccini and Verdi, and was fond of Czech music. He adored 'Carmen', and was much encouraged by the thought of its initial failure – this gave him hope! He liked England and kept a selection of English coins.

According to Hoffmann, Schoenberg listed five categories of people to avoid: –

- 1) Oboists (pressure on the brain leads them to madness!)
- 2) Bassoon players (as above)
- 3) Tenors (especially Richard Tauber)
- 4) Cellists (they are never satisfied with the secondary melody!)
- 5) Jewish conductors over 6 ft tall (meaning Klemperer, with whom Schoenberg had a love-hate relationship.)