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NEW LIGHT ON BERG AND SCHOENBERG

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Approximately half of the existing correspondence between Berg and Schoenberg was published in English for the first time in 1987 (*The Berg - Schoenberg correspondence*, ed. Brand, Hailey & Harris; Macmillan). There are, of course, many lacunae, and the correspondence is notably one-sided - the majority of Schoenberg's letters are (mainly brief) replies to Berg's letters. The recent discovery of five new letters (fortuitously used as wrapping paper for a transparency sent last year to the composer Colin Matthews from a photo laboratory in Vienna) does nothing to alter this balance, and there is no reply to the third of Berg's letters, tentatively dated to the late autumn of 1931. However the two earlier letters do fill a puzzling gap, as they are the first to refer to Schoenberg's birthday, which fell on September 13.

Readers who turn to the published correspondence will therefore find it all the more puzzling that, writing in 1912, Berg claims to have found out only for the first time the date of Schoenberg's birth, which he believes to be September 12¹. Not Surprisingly this remarkable feat of suppression was followed by a failure to acknowledge Schoenberg's birthday at all in 1913. In 1914 Berg swung to the other extreme by proposing to dedicate the as yet unfinished *Three Orchestral Pieces* to his teacher. Schoenberg's response was less than lukewarm ('I confidently expect that your intention was as good as your will'); and no further letter mentioning Schoenberg's birthday survives until 1921, when Berg, echoing the letter he had sent ten years before, writes 'one day it will be a festive day for the whole world - a day for the world ... to find it incomprehensible that there was a time when it *didn't even take notice* of it.' One can be permitted a wry smile at this display of typically hyperbolic yet defensive bravado.

Schoenberg's birthday reappears only intermittently in the subsequent published correspondence, as one might expect from the gradual change in the balance of the relationship as Berg's international reputation increased. Berg's own birthday figures only twice in the entire correspondence: in a letter *from* Berg, in which he refers to his own fortieth birthday in dedicating the *Chamber Concerto* to Schoenberg for his fiftieth (significantly a year late!); and (at last) from Schoenberg to Berg on the occasion of the latter's fiftieth birthday.

I am grateful for the opportunity to publish these letters here for the first time. They will appear, with full critical apparatus, in my book *Helene Berg wrote Wozzeck*, to be published later this year by University of Ellesmere Island Press.

¹ An amusing and not irrelevant parallel to this may be found in Robin Holloway's 'Berg Centennial Marmalade', which he made by mistake in 1984.

114. Berg to Schönberg

Berghof, September 12 1911

Dear esteemed Herr Schönberg,

Thank you very much, dear, kind Herr Schönberg, for your dear letter which filled me with almost inexpressible joy: as you know, Herr Schönberg, three words from you would have sufficed, but that you should find the time, deprive yourself and the waiting world of immeasurable masterworks in order to send me four ... I am deeply touched at your generosity, and I would have replied at once, dear kind Herr Schönberg, indeed if it were possible, before your dear letter had arrived, if it hadn't been for so many tiresome problems here. My health, once again, has been poor; last week my wife fell under the wheels of our new car, and I was very concerned for her recovery (the car was not too damaged), but now she joins me, dear Herr Schönberg, in sending you every good wish for your birthday, a day which not just the two of us, but all your friends, all musicians, the whole world should hold as sacred. The enclosed twelve volumes, signed by all your pupils, are but the smallest token of the inestimable esteem in which we hold you, dear, good Herr Schönberg. [Berg goes on to comment on the fifth proof of the index to the *Harmonielehre*, on negotiations with UE for repayment of postage on the previous four proofs, on his asthma, on the various lawsuits that Schönberg has instructed him to undertake against UE for late delivery of proofs, on the coincidence between the number of pages in the index and the number of migraines he has had in the past week, on the pain in his wrist that prevents him from writing at greater length, etc.]

Please believe, dear kind Herr Schönberg, in my enduring love and gratitude.

Your Berg

115. Schönberg to Berg

Berlin, September 13 1911

Why did you forget my birthday again??!!

S

116. Berg to Schönberg

Berghof, September 14 1911

Dearest, most kind, esteemed and honoured Herr Schönberg,

I can hardly believe that I have the right to exist on the same planet as you when my miserable inadequacy in failing to reach the post office on time is greeted not merely with reproach, but with seven words that, as with everything that you see fit to honour me with, dear kind Herr Schönberg, I shall treasure for their insight and incomparable beauty and honesty. How can I forgive myself for causing you such pain? I know that I shall only annoy you further by my attempt to excuse my habitual carelessness, but I must explain that after I had written to you and carefully wrapped the volumes I was overtaken by such a severe headache that I could not leave the house. Then just as I was recovering, my wife fell down the stairs breaking her leg in three places, and I drove her to the hospital forgetting that I would pass the post office on the way!! Besides, there is so much unpleasantness here, family affairs which continually involve me in the most tedious of arguments, that I hardly find time for even the most urgent of tasks, such as the sixth proof of the *Harmonielehre* index which arrived here today by special messenger - I hardly dare write the name of that incomparable work without going on my knees to thank you, dear kind Herr Schönberg, for honouring me with the smallest, most insignificant part in its preparation. Please don't be angry with me, dear good Herr Schönberg, and accept my profoundest thanks and gratitude, in which my wife will surely join me when she has recovered from the severe concussion which accompanied her accident.

Your Berg

116a. Schoenberg to Berg

Berlin, September 23 1911

Here are the books back: I have them already. Please be so kind as to see to the refund of the postage I have been obliged to pay in order to return them to you.

S

Berg to Schoenberg

Zürich, undated (?November 1931)

Dearest, best friend,

Thank you for your kindest of telegrams, which was forwarded to me from Leningrad, and

thence from Budapest. The performances there were both excellent, and I write now just before the dress rehearsal of the Swiss première. The singers here are quite mediocre, but the director is enthusiastic and everywhere I am treated with the greatest of respect. In two days time I leave for Geneva where there is to be a week long festival devoted to my music (and yours and Webern's too, I hope), and then to Copenhagen for the Danish premiere of my opera.

Yesterday evening we tried to listen to the broadcast of your Male Choruses, but the sound was so bad that we gave up in despair - besides, we were invited to a champagne reception which we felt it would be churlish not to attend. I must study harder the score of these profound pieces - whose words fill me with considerable enthusiasm. What glorious thoughts! - and the music! Well, I think I can in all honesty describe it as most interesting. How we wait with baited breath for more new works from your pen. One can't even begin to imagine how they will turn out!!

We had greatly looked forward to joining you and your wife in Barcelona in December. But now the house you had found for us, and all the furnishings you have spent the last weeks looking for, will have to remain unused. Since the Swedish premiere of my opera has been postponed for several weeks it will simply not be possible to get away; besides, my wife is not in the best of health. To think that if I had not turned down the Berlin professorship you so kindly obtained for me I would have had no time at all to work on my new opera! The only thing that sustains me in all this is the thought that you are writing your opera!! How that fills me with anticipation, so that I tremble with excitement at the mere thought of it!!! I cannot even begin to imagine how it will sound!!!! What is it about?

From your Berg

[Schoenberg's reply to this is missing]