Letters to the Editor

From David Matthews

I am happy to take up Mark Doran’s suggestion to elucidate the tonal background of A Survivor from Warsaw (Tempo 218, p.55). I think it can be clearly demonstrated that in Schoenberg’s later twelve-note works in general, a tonal background becomes more audibly evident. In many places in A Survivor from Warsaw, for instance, the harmony and the melodic lines contain tonal allusions. Moreover, the piece has from the start a strong attachment to the tonality of C, as the opening fanfare shows:

![Ex.1](image1)

Ex.1

Tempo I (\( \text{J} = 80 \))

Despite the prominent A flat here (and in the ensuing four bars), I hear the suppressed background tonality as C major rather than C minor: the A flat wants to go down to G, the high D sharp to E which is sounded with it. This urge towards C major is confirmed by the last 20 bars of the piece, the setting of the Sch’ma Yisroel for unison male chorus. The vocal line uses 109 notes; that heard most frequently (sixteen times) is C, followed by E (and C sharp: eleven times each). C is prominent in the first five bars of the vocal line, though the transposition of the initial six notes of the series, which though Methodically necessary is musically somewhat questionable; but I won’t start an argument about serialism here! The slight tonal ambiguity is in any case right for the piece: initial horror (the opening fanfare: reveille at the concentration camp) has been turned into triumph, but it is a grim triumph: these men are about to die. Unsullied C major would be too easy a gesture here.

Writing in the 1920s about his twelve-note technique, Schoenberg always stresses the necessary avoidance of tonal implications. In his 1946

![Ex.2](image2)

Ex.2

fanfare inevitably suggests E (major or minor), then moving to A flat major; but at bar 88 C major is triumphantly attained, the high E natural a resolution of the E flats in bar 86 (see Ex.2: words omitted).

The chorus part is doubled throughout by trombone, and so is audibly the Hauptstimme, but its tonal allusions tend to be contradicted by the orchestral harmony, except in bar 84 where the bass underlines A flat major. The last three bars of the piece, however, show an unprecedented tonal clarification (see Ex.3: words omitted; most orchestral parts omitted in bars 95-6).

We have here a succession of overlapping canons on the four notes of the opening fanfare, plus E and the E flat that strives towards E, which are the culmination of the chorus part. Schoenberg cuts off the canons at a point where C major is most powerfully implied, with the trumpets sounding C and E (the C reinforced by the four horns), the G in the bassoons, lower strings and tuba, and a timpani roll on C. A flat is still strongly present in the final bar on the trombones but, just as in the opening fanfare, it leans down to the G that is sounded beneath it. There is, in addition, the (fairly unobtrusive) woodwind tremolando that supplies the remain-
addendum to the essay ‘Composition with Twelve Tones (1)’ (see Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, London 1975, pp.244-5), he permits a relaxation of some of his original strictures - against octave doubling, for instance - but insists that these should not lead to the reintroduction of tonality, and he seems to be criticizing Berg for doing just this in *Lulu*. Yet Schoenberg contradicts himself in the music he was actually writing at this time, and I believe that in re-incorporating elements of tonality into his music he only made his language richer and more eloquent, as *A Survivor from Warsaw* testifies.

12 Woodlands
Clapham Common North Side
London SW4 0RJ