Schoenberg's Moses and Aron; A Logical Successor to Nineteenth-Century Opera?

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INTRODUCTION

Schoenberg's Moses und Aron has been called the most important product of his musical maturity, implying that many of his theoretical, musical, philosophical, and spiritual ideas, both public and personal, can be found in this unique work. The work does not fit neatly into any prescribed category that has come before it or after it. It is possible, however, to trace the development of the work from Schoenberg's own preceding compositions, which in many cases provide the roots of ideas more fully developed in Moses und Aron. Among its predecessors in the opera literature though, it remains unique. The reasons for the work's individuality are numerous, but it is most obviously different in that the opera was written during Schoenberg's twelve-tone period.

The twelve-tone compositional technique is a method that was developed by Schoenberg during a period from about 1915 to 1923. Schoenberg felt it was necessary to develop this method of composition in order to heighten structural unity within pieces of music and to "emancipate the dissonance" which had grown to new heights in the compositions of the late Romantics, such as Strauss and Wagner. An aim of this paper is to provide a succinct
explanation of the twelve-tone method, which will be necessary in order to comprehend the analysis. We shall see that Schoenberg's method is no different than any other method of composition once we become acclimated to the terminology and methods.

The schools of opera to which Schoenberg will be compared will be represented by Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner. Each of these composers made important strides in the field of opera, Verdi by bringing Italian "number" operas to their pinnacle and Wagner by establishing the tradition of the music-drama in Germany. It would be reasonable to suppose that Schoenberg would carry on some of the traditions of these major figures of nineteenth-century opera, since composers often look to their predecessors concerning matters of style and form. The question being asked then is one of Schoenberg's logical succession after these composers. Does he break all connections with the past in developing the twelve-tone technique, or are there suggestions of the influence of past composers? The real question concerns Schoenberg's methods of creating musical unity. Schoenberg must have some means of unifying his work. Without this, the piece becomes simply a mass of unrelated notes, hardly an opera. Through a broad scene-by-scene analysis, concentrating primarily on the first act, I shall examine whether Moses und Aron makes a logical sort of progression from its tonal ancestors or whether it makes a clean break and begins a
new tradition.
AN OVERVIEW OF THE TRADITIONS OF VERDI AND WAGNER

It seems best to begin with a detailed explanation of two major schools of opera which preceded Schoenberg. The crowning point of nineteenth-century Italian opera is best represented in the late works of Verdi. Verdi's operas are often designated as number operas, which consist of separate "numbers" (that is, arias, recitatives, duets, etc.) that are separated distinctly in the score. Although Verdi continued throughout his career with the basic number opera, his later works showed a definite maturation. Verdi's interest is in the expression of human passion through song. As Donald Grout puts it:

through that medium he creates a musical structure of sensuous beauty and emotional power, basically simple and uncomplicated by philosophical theories with an appeal so profound, so elemental, that it can hardly be conveyed or even intelligibly discussed in any other language than that of music itself.

Though still retaining the classical Italian qualities of clarity, dramatic simplicity and the expressive possibilities of the voice, the late works of Verdi generally display more varied harmonies, continuity of presentation and a furthering of equality between the
orchestral instruments and the solo voices.

If Verdi brought Italian opera to its pinnacle, then it was surely Richard Wagner who broke tradition and established a "new" art form -- the music-drama. For Wagner, the function of music was to serve dramatic expression. Although Verdi anticipated equality between instruments and voices, Wagner made the two completely equal. His use of leitmotives allows characters in the music-drama to be represented thematically even when they are singing some other melody. The development of the leitmotif technique allowed for complexities that had been unimaginable thus far. Characters could be announced with their themes; different motives could sound together allowing the orchestra to literally tell a story.

In addition to the leitmotif technique, Wagner completely abolished the use of the Italian number opera. Wagner's operas cannot be neatly divided into scenes of aria, duets and recitative. Rather, the divisions are broad, formal separations into acts and scenes. Wagner does use a sense of formal structure in his works. Acts are frequently written in sections or periods, each of which is organized in some recognizable musical pattern, most often AAB (Bar form) or ABA (three part form). These forms are evident to the listener only upon analysis and are probably not intended to be heard. Nevertheless, they exist, and are a formal bow to music and traditions of the past.
Wagner extended opera along another parameter -- harmony. His works are extremely chromatic, greatly expanded from the traditional major-minor system, designated as "common practice period." Wagner's operas are usually so chromatic and harmonically complex, they cannot be said to be "in" one key or another. Rather, the music drama depends on its organization around key relationships. This move toward more complex and chromatic harmony is the first step towards the complete abolishment of the major-minor system as advocated by Schoenberg in his "method of composing with twelve notes related only to each other."

We can see, then, a gradual increase in the harmonic complexity of music from the eighteenth-century common practice period to Schoenberg's revolutionary twelve-tone system. Why Schoenberg's method seems so completely foreign is best seen in a chart showing the harmonic complexity of music over two centuries.

Table 1. Music's harmonic complexity over two centuries.

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Verdi's late operas began using newer harmonies, and the Romantics, like Wagner, carried their use to the extreme. Gradually, chords became so far removed from any diatonic relationship to a key center that a period of "free atonalism" held sway in Western art music. It was mainly a group of composers known as the Second Viennese School, Schoenberg and his students Berg and Webern, who began composing in this vein. This style is characterized by chords which have no function diatonically, non-traditional chords, extreme freedom and unrestrained emotion. Schoenberg's development of the twelve-tone technique followed, a completely new idea in the history of music, one that he felt would save Western art music for the next 100 years.3

There is a definite relationship between Wagner and Schoenberg and their philosophies about music. Wagner utilized the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, or universal art-work, in his extended music-dramas. This was definitely a pushing of the boundaries allowed in opera at the time to a point almost foreign from the number operas of the past. Wagner's work affected all subsequent opera. The ideal of the opera as a significant drama continues today. Stage setting, lighting, costuming, drama, and music all work together toward the purpose of a unified piece of artwork. Yet, Wagner was an experimenter; he was testing the limits of opera as he knew it. Schoenberg, too, was an experimenter and in character was probably very
much like Wagner. After Schoenberg's period of free atonalism, concentrating only on motivic ideas to unify his pieces, he felt there had to be a way of totally unifying his works. The concern with total unity of ideas is analogous to the idea of the universal artwork; a working together toward a common goal. Schoenberg did not know if his system would work well; therefore, he was as much of an experimenter as Wagner.
SCHOENBERG'S TWELVE-TONE SYSTEM

From a methodological viewpoint, twelve-tone music is very different from its major-minor system predecessors; this was inherent in its inception. Schoenberg developed the method as a reaction against musical developments of the early twentieth century. With the greater use of dissonances, the ear became accustomed to them until, Schoenberg felt, they had "lost the fear of their 'sense-interrupting' effect." No longer did one expect preparations or resolutions of dissonances, they simply appeared on the page of music without any attempt at traditional relationship between harmonies. Schoenberg, therefore, set out to accomplish what could be called an extreme structural system of composing with twelve tones related only to each other. As opposed to the uncontrolled freedom of the late Romantics and Viennese atonalists in their early stages, Schoenberg's twelve-tone system represented the epitome of structure and order. It is for this reason that we expect Schoenberg's music in this phase to differ considerably than music before this phase.

Perhaps the best way to explain the nature of Schoenberg's twelve-tone music is to analyze the music of Moses und Aron in particular, rather than using a
generalized explanation. In Schoenberg's twelve-tone composition, traditional harmonies are avoided as much as possible. In Schoenberg's effort to emancipate the dissonance, little reference is made to the components of the harmonic systems of the past. In traditional harmony, the function of dissonance is to add tension to the music, which is released by consonance. Schoenberg's goal was the equality of all twelve tones of the chromatic scale — in effect, destroying any sense of consonance or dissonance. The words have no meaning in Schoenberg's new system; they are a vestige of the past. The basic unit of Schoenberg's method is called the row (also referred to as the original O) or prime (P). For the sake of facility in comprehension, all references to the basic set of twelve tones will be labeled P. Schoenberg said, "a basic set has to be invented anew for every piece. It has to be the first creative thought." That is, for each piece created, all of the musical material was to be obtained from the particular sequence of twelve tones. One can see what a formidable task composing an entire opera in this manner must have been. Schoenberg, himself, had his doubts at the start.

In the first works in which I employed this method, I was not yet convinced that the exclusive use of one set would not yet result in monotony. Would it allow the creation of a sufficient number of characteristically different themes, phrases, motives, sentences, and other forms? At this time, I used complicated
devices to assure variety. But soon I discovered that my fear was unfounded; I could even base a whole opera, *Moses and Aron* (sic), solely on one set...

The basic set that Schoenberg uses is this:

Figure 1. Prime Tone Row

![Prime Tone Row](image1)

Schoenberg can modify this basic row in one of three ways, derived from the rules of traditional counterpoint. He can present the prime in its inversion:

Figure 2. Inverted Tone Row

![Inverted Tone Row](image2)

in which each successive interval is inverted. For example, beginning on the same note "A," the Prime row (P) moves up a half step and the inverted row (I) moves down a half step. Further, he can present the row in its retrograded (R) form:
a simple presentation of the prime row backwards, or he can present the row in its retrograde inversion (RI):

Figure 4. Inverted Retrograde of Original Row

a backwards presentation of the inverted prime (P).

In addition to these four methods of presentation, the row can be transposed to begin on any one of the twelve chromatic tones of the scale. Hence, there are 48 possible presentations of the basic set. There are illustrated in the following table.
Table 2. A Matrix of the 48 Possible Rows

| P0 | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 | P6 | P7 | P8 | P9 | RI0 | RI1 | RI2 | RI3 | RI4 | RI5 | RI6 | RI7 | RI8 | RI9 | RI10 |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| A  | B  | C  | Bb | A  | Bb | A  | Bb | C  | Bb | A   | B   | C   | Bb  | A   | Bb  | C   | Bb  | A   | Bb  | A   |
| B  | C  | Bb | A  | Bb | C  | Bb | A  | Bb | C  | Bb  | A   | B   | C   | Bb  | A   | Bb  | C   | Bb  | A   | Bb  |
| C  | Bb | A  | Bb | C  | Bb | A  | Bb | C  | Bb | A   | B   | C   | Bb  | A   | Bb  | C   | Bb  | A   | Bb  | A   |
| Bb | A  | Bb | C  | Bb | A  | Bb | C  | Bb | A  | Bb  | A   | B   | C   | Bb  | A   | Bb  | C   | Bb  | A   | Bb  |

Horizontally, from left to right are the twelve transpositions of the prime row (P), and from right to left are the twelve retrograde (R) presentations. Vertically, from top to bottom are the twelve transpositions of the inversion of the basic set (I) and from bottom to top are the twelve retrograde inversions (RI).

In addition to the 48 basic rows, there are a few compositional restrictions and allowances. Octave displacement is allowable; a G# is a G# in whatever octave it is presented. This allowance expands the melodic compass to the entire gamut of producible pitches. In
addition, a strict linear presentation of the row is not always the case. There are two alternate possibilities. First, a single row may double back on itself and present certain notes of the row again, as long as the order remains the same.

Figure 5. Act I, sc. 3, Soprano solo, mm 254-59.

This passage presents a transposed retrograde beginning on F, doubling back on itself three times. Schoenberg also often uses fragments of rows, divided into units of six, called hexachords, or four, tetrachords. Besides linear presentations of the rows, Schoenberg says that the row provides the vertical dimension of harmony, evidenced in the opening chords of the work.
These chords contain notes 1-3 and 10-12 of both the original row and its retrograde inversion, presented in a vertical fashion. One can see from this example how difficult it would be from an analytical point of view to account for every note of a twelve-tone composition.

Schoenberg speaks directly to this matter:

'I cannot say it often enough: my works are twelve-note compositions, not twelve-note
compositions... it is not from this angle, or if at all only accidentally, that the aesthetic qualities reveal themselves. I cannot often enough warn against the overrating of analysis implied is serial analysis since it invariably leads to what I have always fought against: the knowledge of how something is made;... rather than what something is!

It is in this vein that we shall proceed. The twelve-tone method created by Schoenberg is only that — a method. Merely labeling rows does little toward understanding Schoenberg's formal, aesthetic structure. His compositional method should, for the most part, be taken for granted when analyzing his works, just as we must "speak the language" of the Common Practice Period when analyzing Beethoven or Mozart.
INFLUENCES OF THE VERDI TRADITION

For the sake of chronology, I will begin my examination of the opera with a search for remnants of the older operatic style, which have been conveniently associated with Verdi. The number operas of this past school were so called because of an ability to divide the score into concise sections of recitative and aria. It is possible to abstract a table of musical contents in a logical fashion in these operas. At first glance, the score to Moses und Aron may appear alarmingly through-composed, but there are clear sectional divisions.

Schoenberg uses the dichotomy of aria and recitative in several ways. First, there are distinct differences in the types of music used for Aaron's solo lines. Sometimes he sings in a very beautiful, lyrical quality (bel canto), while at other times, he sings in a more declamatory style, typical of traditional recitative. (See Figure 8 for an excellent example of the recitative-aria dichotomy.) Schoenberg also symbolizes the differences between aria and recitative by having Aron sing his role and Moses speak his in sprechstimme, a technique first used by Schoenberg in Pierrot Lunaire. The technique involves a sort of half-sung, half-spoken line that lends an eerie quality to
the voice. In the second scene of Act I, Aaron and Moses meet in the wasteland to discuss the task ordained by God to Moses in the first scene. Throughout the opera, the inability of Moses to express himself adequately is represented by the performing of his role in sprechstimme. It is Aaron, on the other hand, who has the gift of eloquence, symbolized by his virtuoso singing role. Act I scene 2 is the first time Aaron is introduced and there is a certain lyrical quality in his singing that is immediately perceived. Compared to the stark, distant musical ideas of the first scene, the second is filled, from its very beginning, with a refreshing lyricism. The introduction to the scene (mm. 98-122) has a lilting, chamber music delicateness to it that prepares Aaron's vocal line in measure 124. At this point, four complete melodic presentations of the row are made; a transposed original (P4), a transposed inversion (I7), a transposed retrograde (R4), and a transposed retrograde inversion (RI7). (See Table 2 for specific row references.)
In the first scene, this type of complete row presentation was not typical, instead Schoenberg uses bits of rows in groups of three or six notes each, or a harmonic combination of new materials. The stretching out of the row across a single vocal line gives the music a type of lyrical aria quality, almost *bel canto*. This is clearly
 audible upon a first hearing.

An interview with Sir Georg Solti during a broadcast of the opera by the Chicago Symphony reflected this view about Aaron's singing. He said that all of Aaron's singing should be bel canto except those sections that Schoenberg marks as recitative. Throughout the score, Schoenberg marks certain passages recitative in Aaron's singing and they are all framed with lyrical aria-like sections. This, then, is our first clue to Schoenberg's use of the vestiges of the number opera format. While they certainly cannot be labeled recitative and aria, the distinctions occur nonetheless. Perhaps it is best to examine a few of the recitative passages to see how they differ fundamentally from the rest of Aaron's singing. Most recitatives from the time of Verdi will have a different character from that of the preceding aria. We should therefore expect a similar treatment by Schoenberg. The first recitative occurs in Act I scene 2, measure 178, just after Aaron's lyrical statement of the four transformations of the row.
Figure 8. Act I, sc. 2, mm 174-80. **

174

Recitativ, P4 - (langsamer / slower)

Aron

Vocal line

Mosei

Musical notation

Sir

Vocal line

Choral line

"Inhale God, chords transposed"
One can see immediately a fundamental difference between the music in measure 174 and that in 178. The melody in the marked recitative becomes less interesting both rhythmically and melodically. Small intervals are used, emphasizing the importance of the text at this point, rather than the beauty of the singing. Secondly, the texture in the recitative becomes much thinner, reduced to only a few strings rather than the entire orchestra. Last of all, the tempo slows down to further emphasize contrast, another holdover from the older types of recitative. After this break in texture, tempo, and melodic gesture, the music returns to the more lyrical character of the preceding section.

Other recitative sections occur mainly in scene 4 of the first act (mm. 768, 817, 833, 845, and 860). While most of them parallel the structure of the recitative at measure 178, a few of serve other purposes. Measure 817 has a recitative that recalls another function of older recitatives. In early opera, the function of recitative was mainly plot oriented. It really was little more than heightened speech. The recitative shows the people becoming caught up in the zeal of their new God, and it is spoken by the chorus with extremely dry orchestration for support. This is contrasted by the singing of the people's hymn immediately before and after. Hence, recitative has more than one of its past functions in the opera.

The hymn that the people sing is an additional bow to
past compositional techniques on the part of Schoenberg. The hymn appears three times in the fourth scene of Act I. In this scene, the people mock the idea of worshiping an unseen God, causing Moses to admit his weakness before the people and Aaron to perform three miracles to win their faith and make them believe. The peoples' hymn occurs after each of the three miracles: the changing of Moses' rod into a serpent, the transformation of Moses' healthy hand into a leprous one, and the changing of the Nile's water into blood. Schoenberg composes the hymn sections using a cantus firmus technique in which the melody, the hymn, is not changed, but the counterpoint around it is varied.

In each of the three appearances of the people's hymn, the score is marked *tempo di marcia* and for 20 measures the tempo is a triumphant common time with the prominent hymn melody. To further emphasize the march feeling, Schoenberg uses the triangle, tambourine, and tam-tams to create a powerful rhythmic march as well. The first appearance of the hymn is in the baritone voice of the chorus (mm. 689-704), clearly marked by the symbol for *Haupstimme*, noting that voice as the most prominent.
Measures 798-813 present the hymn melody in the mezzo-soprano voice. At measure 937, Schoenberg presents the cantus firmus melody in strict imitative counterpoint in a canon at the unison, one measure apart. This final appearance, after the third miracle, illustrates the climactic acceptance of the new God by the people and provides a dramatic ending to the first act. Another comparison to past artistic forms that Schoenberg uses is
his rich use of contrapuntal writing. The chorus parts especially abound in fugues, stretti, imitative counterpoint and other forms and structures too numerous to exhaustively isolate. This technique seems reminiscent of the large polyphonic choral masterworks of Bach and Handel. There are some excellent examples of this contrapuntal writing in the fourth scene of Act I. At the opening of the scene, the people anxiously question Moses and Aaron about the new God in the form of a double fugue. The sopranos and altos have a two part contrapuntal line which is answered four measures later by the tenors and basses; however, the bass line is a transposed inversion of the soprano, and the tenor is a transposed inversion of the alto.

Figure 10. Act I, sc.4, chorus parts, mm 442-50.
Measure 499 presents a rhythmic imitation in the chorus part, again between sopranos and basses and the tenors and altos. Karl Worner, author of perhaps the most expansive analysis of the work states that "polyphony is never introduced for its own sake, but always serves the dramatic context." 44

The supreme example of Schoenberg's use of polyphony to serve the context of the story is the 42 bar interlude between the two acts. After the close of Act I, Moses goes out into the wilderness. For forty days, he is gone; the people hear no word from him. The Interlude serves to express the people's concerns and worries over the absence of their leader. They ask where he is, fearing that they shall never see him again and that they have been forsaken by God. Schoenberg orchestrates the Interlude with a very small chamber orchestra: 3 celli, 3 violas, 3 horns, 2 flutes and 2 bassoons, plus the chorus. The chorus is an expansion of the sprechstimme vs. singing idea that Schoenberg uses for the two brothers. The tone of the small piece is gossip oriented, and the web of spreading fear and gossip is spun with a highly complex polyphonic thread. A speaking chorus whispers four rhythmic motives that return literally and or incorporated into the sung lines in the Interlude. Measure 5 begins a double fugue with subject (Mezzo-soprano, mm. 5) and countersubject (tenor, mm. 5).
The fugue winds itself into a frenzy of "gossip-spreading," tossing the motives back and forth between the parts, finally climaxing into a unison statement of the first spoken statement seen in measures 39 and 40.
Figure 13. Interlude, mm 33-42.
There is one more look backwards at an older musical style of presentation, this time more directly linked with Verdi's school of opera -- the use of accompaniment patterns. Schoenberg's use of accompaniment patterns, as we might expect, will not be completely strict; rather, they are suggested by repeating nonmelodic motives, often serving dramatic purposes as well as structural ones. The first use of accompaniment occurs in Act I scene 3 in which three proponents of the new faith, a young girl, a young man, and another man zealously tell of the events they saw in the wasteland concerning Moses and Aaron, who is to be his mouthpiece. The opening measures introduce an eighth note pattern that is repeated.

Figure 14. Act I, sc. 3, mm 244-53.
Throughout the songs of the three, various combinations of eighth notes are used to accompany the songs. While this may seem ordinary of itself, there is a particular thrust to the eighth-note patterns that seems to give a lively, forward-reaching quality to the section. The eighth notes all "push" across the bar line to longer beats, as seen in measures 249-52 of the preceding example, indicated by the arrows in the score. This forward quality is represented in the opening motives of the two young people's songs (measures 255 of Figure 5 and measure 267)
Figure 15. Act I, sc. 3, tenor solo, mm 267-73

while the violas give the added thrust to the other man's song in measure 279. This lively eighth-note motion carries symbolic weight as a representation of disciples of the new God, and the zeal of youthful infatuation.

Another accompaniment pattern is found in this scene. In contrast to the vitality of the first, this one
represents the priest and the hostile crowd and connotes a stodgy, lumbering quality, symbolic of the old beliefs. In measure 290, the pulse of the dotted eighth note is destroyed and an accompaniment pattern characterized by staccatissimo eighth notes off the beat is used to accompany the doubtful words of the priest and the crowd.

Figure 16. Act I, sc. 3, mm 255-92.
The two patterns continue in opposition until measure 377 when the two appear together as the crowd splits into two halves, representing the simultaneous existence of youthful acceptance and firm resistance. This is interrupted by the entrance of Moses and Aaron, signaled by the rhythmic and melodic motive of the first accompaniment pattern in measure 398.

Figure 17. Act I, sc.3, soprano solo, mm 397-98.

There is one other example of an accompaniment pattern with a decidedly symbolic nature. Before the series of miracles, the people denounce God (mm. 566-620) saying: "Keep away with your new god, with this almighty one."

Every time this statement is uttered, the tempo becomes a quick 3/4 feeling, symbolizing the old-fashioned Viennese waltz of Schoenberg's forefathers, possibly an anachronistic projection of the nonacceptance of Schoenberg's methods onto the structure of his work. There is a much clearer example of this in the second act when Aaron returns to the people their old gods, symbolized by the Golden Calf. Measures 201-274 illustrate the people's joyful celebration because of their return of their visible, manifest gods, all accompanied by a strong waltz
feeling and melody.

Figure 18. Act II, sc. 2, mm 200-07.
We can see then that Schoenberg does rely on past forms and compositional techniques. They are often stretched to nearly unrecognizable limits, yet they do seem to exist, thereby showing Schoenberg as a careful borrower of past ideas for specific reasons.
INFLUENCES OF THE WAGNERIAN TRADITION

We have already hinted at some of the symbolic functions of Schoenberg's score. It is this representation of an idea as a theme or musical unit that seems to be a logical progression from the leitmotives in the music-dramas of Wagner. The prime example perhaps not unexpectedly is found in the first five bars of the score. From a single musical idea, Schoenberg develops a 6-note theme that recurs throughout the entire opera, altering its meaning and significance specific to the context in which it is placed. This ability to communicate a textual idea without spoken dialogue or written word embraces Wagner's concept of music-drama. The total musical entity is the worth of the piece; not a separation of voices and instruments. The total unification of parts tells the story. It is likewise in Moses und Aron.

The two musical units that return repeatedly during the opera develop from the first two bars of music, seen in Example 6. These chords are sung before the opera begins, in front of the curtain. They are entrusted to be solo singers, each of them doubled by an instrument in the orchestra. The voices represent the idea of the infinite God who is omnipresent and unseen, as Moses later describes
Him. It is a presence realized in sound rather than words to further emphasize God's infinite and omnipresent qualities.

Each of the chords has three voices and is held for a duration of three quarter notes. The chords also stretch across three measures of time, all probable references to the power and perfection of the number three in Judeo-Christian traditions. The chords are perfectly symmetrical in a number of qualities. All of the notes are derived from the original row (P0) and the retrograde inversion ending on P0's last note. (Refer to Table 2, RI3) The notes included are the first and the last three of P0 and the first and the last three of RI3. The intervallic movement across the chords, that is, the voice leading between the men and women's parts is identical. Additionally, the chord structure is perfectly symmetrical. The first and last chords are both Viennese fourth chords, a chord particularly used by Schoenberg consisting of a tritone and a perfect fourth stacked on top of each other. Schoenberg was fond of this chord because it denied any sense of functional harmony. The tritone which evenly divides the octave into six semitones and the perfect fourth together have no place in pre-Schoenbergian harmonies. The two inner chords are also identical structurally, consisting of an augmented fifth and a diminished octave. Hence, we have a perfectly symmetrical movement from beginning to end in three short measures that
is completely self-contained and immensely symbolic. Schoenberg says in his document *Twelve-Tone Composition* of 1923:

> At the root of all this is the unconscious urge to try out the new resources independently, to wrest from them possibilities of constructing forms, to produce with them alone all the effects of a clear style, of a compact, lucid and comprehensive presentation of the musical idea.

So it is clear that Schoenberg is concerned not only with the mechanics of his new method of composing but also with the symbolic possibilities it affords the composer by its own nature. In other words, the appearance of "row themes" in certain places relates semantically to his storylines, just as Wagner's leitmotives represent characters and ideas.

The idea of God, the germinal chords of Figure 6, symbolize order and perfection by their symmetrical configuration. Never again do they appear in this pure form and likewise, never do we see Moses this close to God's infinite qualities. The chords themselves suggest infinity in that they are free from harmonic suggestion. No traditional key is suggested by the three measures; the sound is quite elusive and nebulous. The idea of God as the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last is embraced by the palindromic nature of the chords themselves, and on another level, the use of the first and last three notes of
the prime row and its "last," or further removed mutation, the retrograde inversion. In the first three bars, Schoenberg provides a musical and semantic unit that never appears again in this pure form.

The representation or voice of God to Moses is achieved using a simultaneous speaking and singing chorus, the six solo singing voices and a speaking men and boys choir. When God reveals himself to Moses, there emerges a six-note theme, the remaining six notes in the middle of the original row.

Figure 19. Act I, sc. 1, mm 11-12. 23

The theme is in every way as perfect as the chords of the first few measures; however, it is this theme that Schoenberg chooses to use as the symbol of God's tangible representation before Moses. Worner says, "...the theme always retains its individual character as a symbol of eternal immutable volition. The theme rests in itself. It is entirely linear in conception, free of any harmonic obligation, and invented wholly in the spirit of twelve-note music." 24

Intervally, the theme is symmetrical, but it is furthermore an inverted retrograde of itself. Schoenberg
uses a minor second on either end, then a major second on either end, followed by a tritone in the middle. (See Figure 19) This arrangement outlines and highlights the tritone, a favorite interval of Schoenberg, because it equally divides the octave and is therein of a symmetrical nature. Remember, too that since the theme is extracted from notes four through nine of the original row, the tritone is Schoenberg's central interval there as well. The major and minor sounds are intervals typical of Schoenberg's twelve-tone writing. It should also be mentioned that in all of the transformations and transitions of the basic row, this series of intervals provides the middle six notes. Hence, the importance of the theme is obvious. Worner quotes Schoenberg:

> these ideas are also a perfect demonstration of what he calls 'the unity of musical space, in which there exists'(sic)no absolute down, no right or left, forward or backward'...Only the method of composing with twelve notes 'which are related only with one another,' as Schoenberg significantly called the twelve-note principle, permitted the musical symbolization of eternity and God's infinity.  

Because the six-note theme is God's revelation of himself, it would be expected that it would appear when God speaks through the burning bush. This assumption is correct; however, the theme or mutations or it at other times in the score symbolizing different ideas relative to its placement and length. The first appearance of the
theme occurs in the first scene of Act I in measure eight. It is stated over Moses's verbalization of the nature of God ("Only one, infinite, omnipresent one, unperceived, and inconceivable God"). This is appropriate because they are the first words that Moses speaks and they verbalize the symbolism of the six-note theme.

Each time the voice emanates from the burning bush, the theme appears (mm. 11-15, mm. 23-25, mm. 66-70, mm. 79-80). These references illustrate the theme arising from various solo instruments, usually overlapping their entrances as the chorus speaks-sings. Very often, the sung parts of the burning bush are transformations of the infinite God chords in the first measures. Measures 11-15 consist solely of these chords, stretched out over several measures. Measure 23 begins in the men's voices with the last Viennese fourth chord of measure 3 and presents what is essentially a retrograde of the infinite God chords, albeit not in the original quarter note rhythm.

In David Lewin's thorough analysis of this first scene, he proposes a division into four sections: the exposition, in which Moses encounters the bush and Moses unsuccessfully tries to escape his duty to set his people free (mm. 1-28); the agon, in which Moses offers a series of four objections which God countered (mm. 29-66); the prophecy that the people are the chosen people, (mm. 67-85); and the coda in which God tells Moses to "Go forth now!".
the exposition, the transposed theme arises over the words: "God... who has once more awakened... great thoughts in my own mind." (mm. 17-18), symbolizing again, the revelation of God to Moses.

Moses' first objective is answered by the burning bush in a new form of the theme. Moses asks: "Who am I to combat the power and force of that blindness?" The burning bush answers that if Moses and the people are united with God, they will be freed from the bondage of the Pharaoh. At this point, the theme is transformed, keeping the same intervallic distance but utilizing all ascending intervals.

Figure 23. Act I, sc. 1, chorus parts, mm 33-35. 27

This seems to symbolize a tangible promise, a directly promised action on the part of God. Moses' last objection, (mm. 47-50), in the agon section, refers to his inability to express himself verbally. He tells God that thought is easy and fluent but speech is difficult. Over this plea,
the theme is heard in various overlapping transformations. Never again, is the theme stated in this easy manner over one of Moses' spoken lines, symbolizing God's presence in Moses. That is, with God as his leader, Moses understands, represented by the six-note theme; however, he cannot actually express it directly himself. For this reason, the theme is not often associated with Moses' appearance in the opera, especially over his speaking lines.

God replies that Aaron shall be Moses' mouthpiece to the people so that they may understand. This is stated in measures 59 and 60, by the chorus with an appearance of the infinite God chords. The chords are almost identical with the first appearance except one is slightly imperfect. (Compare Figure 24 with Figure 6)

Figure 24. Act I, sc. 1, chorus parts, mm 59-60.

Perhaps this is symbolic of the eventual chasm that will grow between the brothers when Aron translates God's words into the needs of the people for a tangible God—hence, an
imperfection of God's nature. These measures are parallel later in the opera (mm. 630-31) when Aaron works the three miracles to convince the people that God is real, again giving the people what they need to see to believe. Both times, Aaron distorts the purity of God's essence into the people's reality. At the close of the first scene, over God's command to "Go forth now," the six-note theme is fragmented into two and three note units along with the appearance of isolated chords that are identical to the first few bars. This seems to mark both the scene's end and the beginning of the rest of the opera, in that now, the dissemination of God's word begins and the more fragmented nature of the themes is typical for the majority of the rest of their appearances.

It is not only in the first scene that Schoenberg utilizes this Wagnerian leitmotif technique with these two particular themes; they appear throughout the opera in various transformations. In the meeting between Moses and Aaron in the wilderness (mm. 174-85) Aron describes God as one of which dare not be conceived, which offends Moses. Immediately Aaron replies with a statement of the six-note theme placed over Moses' description of God as "not conceived because unison, can never be measured, everlasting, eternal, because ever present, and almighty." The exact orchestration is paralleled from this section to measures 480-483 when Moses and Aaron announce to the people that they have been chosen by God. Again, Aaron
sings the theme while Moses speaks. The people want to know where He is, so that they may bring gifts and make sacrifices to Him. They say that if He protects them, He can be their God. This bargaining is represented in the score by a fragmented presentation of the theme across the voice parts.

Figure 25. Act I, sc. 4, chorus parts, mm 491–93. 29
with octave transpositions, as opposed to the rather pure melodic form of the theme Aaron had just presented a few measures earlier. In measures 523-533, Aaron presents two transpositions of the theme, over an extended cue in the orchestra, telling the people to "close off your vision and stop up your hearing. For in this way shall you see and hear him!" Still the people do not understand, causing Moses to admit his weakness before the people. (mm. 623-28)-These measures are an exact parallel of Moses' final objection to God in the wilderness (mm. 47-53). The theme is stated only once in its original form at measure 623.

The dramatic action then shifts to Aaron. Realizing the helplessness of this brother, Aaron gives the people three miracles, signaled by an appearance of the infinite God chords (mm. 630-31); as we have already mentioned. Aaron performs three miracles, the changing of Moses's rod into a serpent, the transformation of Moses's healthy hand into a leprous one, and the transformation of the Nile's water into blood. Before each miracle, the six-note theme appears. First, in Moses' vocal line (mm. 642), second, it is taken up by the people (mm. 789), and lastly, during the third miracle it is slightly altered in its appearances. Aaron states it completely in measure 860; however, in a surge of emotion, Aaron says that God has promised that:
You will be free then from toil and misery
This is His promise:
He will lead you to a land where milk and
honey flow
There you shall have earthly pleasure from
what
in spirit was vowed your fathers. 30

This is not what God has promised Moses in measures 71 ff.
God says: "the people will undergo hardships that have in
milennia ever come to be conceived...you'll be a model to
every nation."

When Aaron promises that the people will be care-free,
he takes up a new melody

Figure 26. Act I, sc. 4, mm 898-99. 31

which is reflected in a joyous chorus by the people (mm.
918-924)

Figure 27. Act I, sc. 4, alto,
mezzo-sop part, mm 918-20. 32
in which Aron's previous melody appears across all of the voice parts, symbolizing its acceptance by the people. This is followed by the people's hymn in strict imitative counterpoint (mm. 937 ff.), at no time involving the two themes from the beginning of the opera.

During Act II, as the drift away from God becomes more apparent, the themes representing God are hardly used.
This act is largely preoccupied with Aaron's pacifying of the people by creating an image for them to worship. However, when Moses returns from the wilderness after his long absence, so does the theme, in almost unrecognizable forms.

The first few measures of Act II scene 4 presents the theme in the orchestra, split into two halves.

Figure 28. Act II, sc. 4, woodwinds, mm 967-69. 33

4. Scene / Scene 4

Throughout the next scene, the confrontation between the two brothers provides many opportunities for fragments of the theme that are too numerous to cite. The infinite God chords appear first in measure 1003 over Moses' admonition to Aaron that no image can equal God's powerful word. Aaron says that the tablets that God has given Moses are as much an image as the Golden Calf at which point Moses admits defeat and smashes the tablets, as the themes become fragmented beyond recognition.
Thus the conflict between the word and the image is unresolved; he admits his defeat in the final bars of the act — "O word, thou word that I lack."

Also present is Wagner's abandoning of the number opera in favor of larger forms and structural unity. Structural unity is attained not only through the use of
leitmotives, but also by the large-scale structures Schoenberg uses to divide his opera. The long scene 4 in Act I can be seen as a rondo in which the people’s hymn returns repeatedly as an A section with the three miracles providing the B, C, and D sections. Likewise, Karl Worner has structured the Golden Calf scene of Act II as a five movement symphony. Wagner, too, was concerned with this idea of continuous music divided into large structures, not necessarily apparent to the audience, nonetheless definable upon analysis. Such an appreciation of the forms leads to a greater understanding of the work and Schoenberg’s compositional method itself. Schoenberg says that his method has no other aim than comprehensibility, but that better-prepared music lovers require better-prepared or more cerebral works of art.
SCHOENBERG'S MUSICAL-PHILOSOPHY

Although it would be possible to trace other examples of Wagnerian leitmotives throughout the score, an exhaustive search would certainly go beyond the scope of this study and would not add anything to our knowledge of the score. The importance is that we see that Schoenberg utilizes Wagner's idea of associating music with idea to a very great extent in his work, so much so that in many respects Schoenberg eclipses Wagner by proposing profound philosophical questions in his works, especially those of a religious nature. One of these questions provides an unresolved dilemma that is the crux of the entire opera. How is it that a concept that is inconceivable may be represented to the people so that they will understand? Moses does not have Aaron's gift of eloquence and is thus not tempted to fashion an easily comprehended image for the people. Aaron recognizes that the people do not understand, and he acts upon their needs. The question then arises, just as in the scene last discussed: are Moses' tablets also an image? What is the distinction? Here Schoenberg shows his allegiance to Wagner by his concern with musical semantics. Yet, he goes one step further in creating a philosophical system so complex it
requires a complex score to adequately represent it.

Schoenberg speaks directly to this question long before the actual composition of *Moses und Aron* in two works that surely provide its roots. The text from one of the opus 27 poems composed in 1926 entitled "Not 'Thou shalt' but 'You must'" reads:

Thou shalt make unto thyself no image  
For an image restricts,  
limits, grasps,  
what is to remain unlimited and inconceivable.  
An image demands a name--  
Which you can take only from the small;  
You are not to honour the small!  
You must believe in the spirit!  
Directly, unemotionally,  
and selflessly.  
You must, chosen one,  
You must, if you are to remain the chosen one!  

The second work is a drama entitled *The Biblical Way* written by Schoenberg in 1926-27. David Josef Bach, a boyhood friend of Schoenberg writes about the drama and its eventual connection to *Moses und Aron*.

The hero...of this play in prose, is Max Aruns, a New Palestinian, who wants to found, in 'Ammon-Gaa,' a new Palestine, a new kingdom, which will eventually attract to it all the Jews on earth, and will become God's kingdom...The goal is almost achieved, when Aruns comes to grief because of the imperfect nature of everything human. Not only through others' imperfections, but, as he realises, through his own imperfect nature, which his death as a martyr redeems and lifts to the only level of perfection possible for humans...and yet he is felled not by the
battle carried on with the material resources of power—for his death, too, is only a symbol—nor does he founder through treachery and intrigue, jealousy and revenge and all the other human passions and weaknesses, but through the fact that the weaknesses and sins of others can suck his blood. He is betrayed by his own wife, but only because for a single moment he forgot the greatness of his task, and became entangled in things human, instead of following the bitter path of loneliness. Did he miss the true path? Did he in fact recognize it, but without the power to tread it? Or does he recognize it in death, and follow it only through death? The true path is the biblical path. God has revealed it. Is one to take it at its face value. and follow literally, the revelation found in the Bible, or is one to follow the spirit rather than the letter? But is not the word the spirit itself, its condensation, solidification, the symbol of the idea?

So, for men the true path is the wrong one, just as life intermingles with death...

First, one suddenly realizes that in the single figure of Max Aruns there rage two personalities, Moses and Aaron, who are separated in the opera. Moses is the idea, Aaron is the word. To Moses has gone out the call which he can not deny—"for Thou knowest the Truth!", as the Voice of the Lord replies to him. And later Moses himself says, 'Ineluctable law of thought forces to fulfillment!' That is taken from the field of religion and and transferred to the field of art; the one pervades and illuminates the other. In religion, the law of thought is in an inconceivable God, an 'inexpressible idea with many meanings'. But as soon as it is expressed, it is falsified. Not only through the word of Aaron, whose fate is 'to say it worse than he understands it'; there is an Aaron of this kind within every man, even in Moses himself, just as 'Max Aruns' was nothing but the union of the two, made visible within one person. Because of this visible union he had to die.
In Moses und Aron, Aaron's task is to be Moses' mouthpiece, to interpret the word of God for the people so that they can understand. However, there is an underlying paradox in the Moses' description of God. Moses calls God "thou omnipresent one, unperceived and (unvorstellbarer) unconceivable." The key to the paradox says Grahm Phipps is the German word unvorstellbar. These are two English translations of the word: 1) incapable of being represented, and 2) unimaginable. Phipps says that Schoenberg means God cannot be imagined in earthly terms but the concept of God is capable of being understood. \(^\text{39}\)

Only the libretto of the third act of Moses and Aaron was finished; no music was completed. The plot concerns Moses' admonition of Aaron for presenting a worthless image to the people. Aaron says that he believed he was to speak in images to the heart, while Moses spoke in ideas to the mind. However, Moses counters by saying that Aaron alienated himself from the source, from the idea of and that, as a result, he was satisfied neither with the act. Presumably, according to the text, Aaron is unable to continue living. He is set free but immediately falls down dead.

There seems to be an overwhelming tendency, especially with the consideration of the final scene, to think that one or the brothers is wrong and one is right. Lewin says: the problem posed by the drama is...how God can be brought to the Volk. If the
triple-play combination or God to Moses to Aaron to Volk has broken down between Moses and Aaron, and if Moses-Aaron link cannot be repaired, then the catastrophe of the philosophical tragedy has occurred in Act II and the drama is over. If there is a personal tragedy involved, it is surely that of Moses, and he, as well as or instead of Aaron, should be the one to die (which in a sense he does at the end of Act II). 

In any case, the opera's major question can be condensed into one: how is an inconceivable (unvorstellbarer) entity represented? Schoenberg must have believed traditional harmony and compositional methods could not adequately represent the complexities of the (unvorstellbarer) concept. The sheer genius and complexity of his row systems and structural unity in Moses und Aron illustrate this. The entire opera emanates from a single row of notes, yet it is not repetitive and is a workable, if not brilliant, method of presenting the complex story.

In his method of twelve-tone composition, Schoenberg does hearken back to past traditions of other opera schools; there is a continuum of ideas represented that have been changed and developed over the years. Perhaps, like his student Alban Berg, he believed that with so much that was new to the ears, there needed to be some strongholds. The lyricism of Aaron, the structure of the scenes, and the Wagnerian leitmotive technique are all good examples of this reliance on past authority. Yet, with all of these familiarities, the path is entirely new. The work is new harmonically in the sense of twelve-tone serialism,
but it is also new philosophically. Schoenberg embodies his philosophy through serialism into the composition of his work:

"Thus, artistic value demands comprehensibility, not only for intellectual, but for emotional satisfaction. However, the creator's idea has to be presented..."

Therefore, Schoenberg's work is his work, be it philosophical, spiritual, or artistic, his idea reigns. Much of the interpretation of his work is necessarily speculative, therefore it seems particularly enlightening to read Schoenberg's own words on his music. From these, one gets a clearer picture of a man in search, like Moses, of a proper projection of his ideas and beliefs. It is tempting to draw the parallel between Moses and Schoenberg, each a man in search of a way to communicate with his people. Schoenberg, in his letters denied this analogy, yet it seems so well defined, one cannot completely ignore it.

The theorist who takes the time to unravel the music of Moses und Aron finds a complex score that is wholly unified through the use of a basic tone row. Schoenberg utilizes those methods of past composers that he feels are necessary in his own musical language. We have seen that Schoenberg borrows from the traditions of both Verdi and Wagner, each time incorporating and reinterpreting past methods in light of his own ideas of Twelve-Tone writing.
Schoenberg develops his philosophy to the extent that it is represented in his music as no other composer has done before him. This is Schoenberg's development of a method of musical communication. For those to whom it speaks, Schoenberg has succeeded. For those who do not or cannot understand it, perhaps it is a step too far along the continuum of opera.
NOTES


4. Ibid., 216.


8. Ibid., 1


11. Ibid., 40-41.

12. Schoenberg, Piano-Vocal score, 105-112.


15. Schoenberg, Piano-Vocal score, 161.

16. Ibid., 168.

17. Schoenberg, Orchestral score, 50.

18. Schoenberg, Piano-Vocal score, 40-41.

19. Schoenberg, Orchestral score, 55.

20. Ibid., 81.
21. Schoenberg, Piano-Vocal score, 194.
23. Schoenberg, Orchestral score, 3.
25. Loc. cit.
27. Schoenberg, Orchestral score, 9.
28. Ibid., 18
29. Schoenberg, Piano-Vocal score, 79.
30. Ibid., 147-48.
31. Ibid., 146.
32. Ibid., 149
33. Schoenberg, Orchestral score, 491.
34. Ibid., 520
38. Ibid., 159-61.
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