

# Arnold Schoenberg

Life Dates: 1874-1951

Country of Origin: Austria

Musical Era: Modern



*"I am quite conscious of the fact that a full understanding of my works cannot be expected before some decades. The minds of the musicians, and of the audiences, have to mature before they can comprehend my music. I know this, I have personally renounced an early success, and I know that -- success or not -- it is my historic duty to write what my destiny orders me to write."*

Arnold Schoenberg

Arnold Schoenberg was born on September 13, 1874 in Vienna, Austria. He began studying the violin at the age of eight and began composing soon after. As a child, he liked writing short pieces in which he would imitate the style of the violin pieces he was learning.

Schoenberg had many careers and interests. He first worked as the owner of a commission and collection agency, then as a bank clerk, a choir director, and even a cabaret musician in Berlin. He was also an accomplished writer and painter. His musical composition skills allowed him to arrange popular operettas and teach at local universities.

Schoenberg's early compositions sounded like those of Romantic composers such as Tchaikovsky and Brahms. Later, he developed what is known as "12-tone composition." Rather than just using the eight notes of a major or minor scale, this revolutionary style used all 12 notes equally. It was not well received by the public because the melodies in this style of composition were not pretty or easily sung.

Schoenberg married the younger sister of one of his teachers and they had many children. Because he was Jewish, he was forced to leave Germany in the 1930's because of the Nazi takeover. He ended up in America and finally settled in Los Angeles. Los Angeles was a popular spot for many artists who were thrown out of Europe by the Nazis. He later wrote many letters to allow his family and friends to enter the United States as well. Schoenberg died on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1951 in Los Angeles.

Schoenberg was important as both a composer and a teacher of composers. He taught two important composers in Vienna, Berg and Webern. He also gave some lessons to the American composer John Cage.

**Questions from the reading:** How did people react to the 12-tone style?  
Why did Schoenberg leave Germany?  
What was Schoenberg's first job? Was it in music?

**Questions for research:** What does 12-tone mean?  
Who was John Cage? What made him famous?  
What is a cabaret? What is an operetta?

Lesson Plan for *Three Pieces* for chamber orchestra,  
Movements 1 & 2 by Arnold Schoenberg  
(Two sequential lessons)

**Standards** – Music Intermediate II & III

**Performance Indicators for Students:**

- **Understand** how visual art and audible art (music) share common elements
- **Actively listen** to various styles by recording their responses to the Aesthetic Questions: What do I hear? What do I see? What do I feel?
- **Compare** Abstraction/Modern Style of three musical compositions and three paintings
- **Identify** from performances the titles and composers of **Abstract/Modern** music (for this lesson) and connect them to their respective paintings (Standard IVb)
- **Discuss** (Pair/Share) in partners how they feel/what they hear when listening to the music
- **Know** the vocabulary words: abstract, atonal
- **Know** composers and artists from each period

**Objective:**

- Help students understand how Abstract/Modern music and art both share bold, angular colors, an amorphous subject, and line (an atonal system where the listener can interpret for him/herself) and an Abstraction where the focus is organization of the pieces.

**Suggested Materials:**

- Magazines for cut out activity
- Line Drawings by Sal Steinberg
- Handout with Abstract vocabulary definitions included
- White 9 x 12 mounting paper
- Looking at Paintings by Peggy Roalf (Hyperion)
- Self portraits by Schoenberg ([www.schoenberg.at/6-archiv/painting/workd/selfportrait](http://www.schoenberg.at/6-archiv/painting/workd/selfportrait))
- Claude Monet 2002 Calendar (ISBN 2-87770=417-3 Ref. CA 248)
- Landscapes of Austria, Berlin, Los Angeles
- Laminated copies of Wassily Kandinsky's art (try [www.homedecorators2.artselect.com/](http://www.homedecorators2.artselect.com/) Click "art styles" then "abstract")
- World map or globe
- Artworks for *Elementary Teachers, Developing Artistic and Perceptual Awareness* by Herberholz and Herberholz, (published by McGraw Hill, 8th edition)

**Listening Repertoire:**

- *Three Pieces* for Chamber Orchestra, movements 1 & 2
- *Wozzeck*, Act III, Scene 3 by Alban Berg
- *Black Angels* by George Crumb
- *The Rake's Progress*, Act III, Scene 2 by Igor Stravinsky

**Visual/Painting Repertoire:**

- *Farbstudie Quadrata 1913*, *Harmonie Tranquille*, and *Jaune, Rouge, Blue* by Wassily Kandinsky and self portraits by Schoenberg

**Students should have Prior Knowledge of:**

- Appropriate audience behavior, including active listening, in a variety of musical settings in and out of school (Standard IIe).
- Haiku form: Line 1 has five syllables, Line 2 has seven syllables, Line 3 has five syllables
- Timbres of orchestral instruments

**New Vocabulary:**

**Atonal:** Absence of tonal center, no sense of key. Each pitch is equal to the others so there is no sense of tension and resolution. Melodies often are made up of all twelve tones instead of the normal eight that are in a major or minor scale.

**Amorphous:** No sense of unity or points of reference. No concrete idea expressed; it's up to the observer/listener to interpret for his/herself.

**Abstract:** In visual art, the emphasis is on organization of the elements; line, shape, and color are more important than true representations of objects, landscapes, or people. In abstract music melody, harmony, and rhythm become less important.

**Lesson #1 (Journal Entries)**

- **Ask**, “What is a landscape? Journal Entry: “Write your answers, in words or phrases, to this (*essential*) question. Students take about five minutes. (examples; sand, beach, mountains, hills, water, rivers, gardens)
- **Students Pair/Share:** “Choose between you who will be **A** and who will be **B**. Choose who will listen first and who will share. Then take turns. Teacher asks one of the pair to share with the class what their partner said (This provides a short assessment glimpse.)
- **Journal Entry:** “Given your ideas of a landscape, what do think a soundscape might contain?” “Write your thoughts into your journal.” (List the many ideas on the board: sounds used in the way that paint might be used, sounds that describe a picture, sounds that are used to tickle your imagination, sounds or timbres that make you feel a certain way or affect your mood).
- **Journal Entry:** “What is your favorite landscape?”
- Have students share with the large group and record the common experiences and ideas.
- On the back of the paper have students describe what kind of music, instruments or other sounds that they could use to describe this place.
- Students share their ideas with the class.

**Lesson #2 (Student as Artist and Active Listener)**

Students experience feelings of discontinuity by going from familiar landscape images to unfamiliar ideas and thoughts about tonality.

**Explain** that the usual way of writing music was changed by some Twentieth Century composers such as Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern. **Ask students**, “How many of you have heard of these composers?”

**Tell students** that visual artists also experimented with different ways to use color, shape and line.

- Students using magazines, cut three objects, an angular shape, some bold color, and a line. (Students will explore the many ways a line can be drawn, see resource). Place a 9 x 12 white paper in front of each student's place. Each student places one of the objects under the paper then rotates to the next seat and places one of the objects under the paper. They rotate again and place the third object under the paper. Student's return to their original seat and begin the task of organizing and gluing the objects on the paper. Hang up on a clothesline rope. Students take a quick look if they want. Take some time for student reflection as to what they just did (deconstruct and reassemble).
- Let's look at a painting by **Wassily Kandinsky**, *The Father of Abstract Art*, to see the many ways he organized his painting. What do you see? “Take a couple of minutes and work together. Record all of what you see into your journals. What might you expect to hear musically? Take a clue from Kandinsky's paintings. What painting might remind you of 12-tone composition? (*Farbstudie Quadrate 1913*) Now let's listen to Schoenberg's abstract composition called *Three Pieces* for chamber orchestra, movements 1 & 2.

- Introduce the students to the vocabulary of Abstract music. Tell them about the atonal system and the 12-tone row. Write one on the staff. Show them the variety of ways that melodies might be organized and modified. For example, choose “Mary Had a Little Lamb” and write the melody backwards (retrograde), upside-down (inversion), or upside-down and backwards (retrograde-inversion).
- Let’s listen to and look at the music and art selections again. Do you think that you would be able to identify the musical selections and painting by its name and period? (Students choose from the variety of indicators for success to show their learning. Students can use the next music period to complete and try other options.)
- Assess students’ learning by choosing from the variety of Indicators of Success.

### **Indicators of Success:**

- Students choose a very familiar “ear tune” that they know and organize its melody using abstract techniques that are used with the 12-tone scale (retrograde, inversion and retrograde-inversion).
- Students can articulate Schoenberg’s music by reflecting on their “art lesson” (organizing pictures they cut from magazines). Students can compare the art and music in a writing exercise.
- Students can point to the correct style of music and paintings as they look and listen.
- Students can point to the correct composer of the music.
- Students can point to the correct artist of the painting.
- Students feel the discontinuity of the Schoenberg selection by expressing it through movement or art, haiku about the *Three Pieces* for chamber orchestra, movements 1 & 2 or by choosing from the options in the follow-up section.

### **Follow-up:**

#### **Suggestions in the follow-up section can be used for the other lessons!**

Journal Entries: Students write their reflections to these questions.

- I would like (or not like) to be a person performing this music because...
- If I were Arnold Schoenberg, I wanted to create music like this because...

OR

#### **Students demonstrate an understanding of the music by:**

- writing poetry using the art or music as the content.
- dancing
- drawing or painting
- devising a Den or Venn diagram or graphic flow chart of the music
- writing a short essay stating their learning
- manipulating “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” to sound like a 12-tone piece

### **Link Up!**

For more information about 12-tone (serial) composition:

**[w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/g\\_twelve\\_tone.html](http://w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/g_twelve_tone.html)**