

## Anton Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 6

### ‘Original’ versus ‘Reduction’, and what to do with the arrangement?

*An essay about Anton Webern's three versions (1909, 1920 and 1928) of his Six Pieces for Orchestra Op. 6, their relevance in today's music life, and why the last version of 1928 should be considered as the definitive version, a conclusion that also affects the 1920 chamber ensemble arrangement.*

Anton Webern (1883-1945) composed his Op. 6 in 1909, at the age of 26, after having written several works for piano, string quartet and orchestra, and after having composed the Passacaglia Op. 1 for orchestra (still under supervision of his beloved teacher Arnold Schoenberg), three song cycles (Op. 2, 3 & 4) and his first published string quartet, the Five Movements Op. 5.

In the particular case of his Six Pieces for Orchestra Op. 6 we are confronted with three different versions, dating from 1909, 1920 and 1928, all published by Universal Edition (UE). It is remarkable that UE has published none of these versions during the composer's lifetime. This adds to the confusion about the validity of these scores. Webern presented the 1928 manuscript to UE on September 7 of that year, but it only appeared in print 30 years later, in 1958, which was thirteen years after Webern's death. The first performance of the 1909 version took place in 1913 at the 'Viennese Scandal concert' on March 31 conducted by Arnold Schoenberg. For this occasion Webern had privately published this original version in 1913 as *Six Pieces for Orchestra Op. 4* with a total of 200 copies. (\* Reprinted in 1983 in facsimile by the *Wiener Stadt- und Landesbibliothek*) The concert led to outbursts and even to fights in the audience. The police had to clear the hall. After the debacle Webern regained his composure. He wrote to his friend the conductor Heinrich Jalowetz (\* *Briefe an Heinrich Jalowetz*, Schott 1999, No. 89. German text. All English translations for this essay by Henk Guitart) on April 5, 1913: '...I would prefer to tell you about the beautiful things. Schoenberg did study my things in a wonderful way. They came out beautifully. He was visibly touched during the rehearsals. The pieces did sound really beautiful. I have to admit that myself.'

With his privately published copies of the Op. 6 score Webern hoped to gain more performances. Schoenberg was instrumental in promoting by talking in 1913 to the conductors Willem Mengelberg in Amsterdam and Henry Wood in London, who had repeatedly shown interest in Schoenberg's works and now were committed to present Webern's Op. 6. The First World War made these projected performances impossible. The duration of the completed Op. 6 is about 12 minutes. The average length of the pieces - expressed in number of bars- is 25 bars; the longest piece has 41 bars, the shortest has 11 bars (\* In the 1928 version a few bars have been omitted). The average length in time- depending on interpretation- is two minutes, the longest piece being about 4'30 and the shortest being about one minute. Webern scored it initially (1909) for 4 flutes (including 2 piccolo's and alto flute), 2 oboes, 2 English horns, 3 clarinets (1 doubling on E-flat clarinet), 2 bass clarinets, 2 bassoons (also 1 double bassoon), 6 horns, 6 trumpets, 6 trombones, tuba, 2 harps, celesta, 3 timpani, percussion (triangle, Glockenspiel, 'Rute', cymbal, tam-tam, snare drum, gran cassa, low bells) and strings (often in divisi parts). (\* UE 13422, first published 1961). This orchestration is the largest that Webern ever used and it is remarkable that he rarely uses the full orchestra. In general the musical content of Op. 6 leaves the impression of chamber music. The use of percussion, as substantial musical element rather than as an effect or as being supportive of other musical elements, is a novelty. In 1918 Schoenberg founded the *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen* (Society for Private Musical Performances) in Vienna. The main goal of the *Verein* was 'to provide artists and art lovers with a real and precise knowledge of modern music'. An interesting format was developed: weekly concerts which would only be open to members of the *Verein*, critics were not allowed and audible approval or disapproval was out of the question. The programs would remain secret until the evening of the concert. The repertoire consisted of chamber music, but orchestral works were also presented, at first in arrangements for piano solo, piano four hands or for two piano's, and later for a chamber ensemble, usually consisting of a few wind instruments, a string quintet, piano and harmonium. The concept of arranging music is as old as music itself, and the composers of the Second Viennese School were as keen on arranging as their predecessors had been. Schoenberg often arranged his own music and that of other composers, and allowed or even commissioned others such as his students Webern and Alban Berg to arrange his music. Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony

Op. 9 has as many as eight forms of appearance, including two arrangements and one revision by Schoenberg himself plus arrangements by Berg and Webern. The arrangement was not always a reduction but could also be an enlargement of the used medium, like in the previous case of Schoenberg's Op. 9, the Sextet *Verklärte Nacht* Op. 4, his Second string quartet Op. 10 and the orchestral version of the *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte* Op. 41. Alban Berg also arranged four of his own works, two as reduction (the Adagio from the Chamber Concerto and the last of the *Altenberg Songs* for respectively three and four instruments) and two as enlarged versions (three movements from the *Lyric Suite* for string quartet exist in a string orchestra version, and the *Seven Early Songs* for voice and piano also have a version with symphony orchestra). Webern arranged works by Joh. Strauss, Hugo Wolf, Franz Schubert, Franz Liszt, Johann Sebastian Bach and Alfredo Casella, and arranged six of his own works, again as reduction and as enlargement. Webern was a member of the Board of the *Verein* and active as one of its *Vortragsmeister* (literally: performance masters), which meant that he oversaw and directed the rehearsals for selected repertoire. During the second season of the *Verein*, in 1920, Webern chose to arrange his Op. 6 for an ensemble of flute (doubling piccolo), oboe, clarinet (doubling E-flat clarinet), percussion (three or four players), piano, and harmonium and string quintet. This formation was the standard *Verein* ensemble as used in the arrangements of larger symphonic works, with addition of the percussionists. Webern also arranged his Five Pieces for Orchestra Op. 10 for the *Verein*, for the intriguing combination of string trio, piano and harmonium. Neither the manuscript nor the used parts of Op. 10 (this arrangement was conducted by Webern five times during the *Verein*) have been found, which is unfortunate because this arrangement must have been even more inventive as the one for Op.6, considering the huge reduction of instruments and colours. The year 1920 was important for Webern, because finally Emil Hertzka, director of Universal Edition in Vienna, signed an agreement with Webern for the publication and distribution of his opus numbers 1, 2, 3 and 6. The First World War had prevented so many decisions in the publishing firm. Contracts for later works by Webern followed soon. It was the idea of being published by such a prestigious firm that counted. Even though the Passacaglia Op. 1 received some performances in large German cities and in Vienna, royalties were meagre. The only two other performances during Webern's lifetime of the 1909 version of Op. 6 have taken place in Bochum, on December 17 of 1922, by conductor Rudolf Schulz-Dornburg, and in January of 1928 in Berlin under Hermann Scherchen (\* Jalowetz No. 276). It is puzzling which material was used for these performances, as Webern writes (\* Jalowetz No. 243) in 1924 that UE (Hertzka) still had not printed the parts. Probably for both performances the parts from the first performance in 1913 were used. (\* Webern only conducted the versions of 1920 and 1928.) Webern conducted six performances of his *Verein* arrangement in Vienna at the regular *Verein* concerts in 1921 on January 23 and 31 (2 times), May 12 (2 times) and 23. However, as can be read in his letter to Jalowetz of September 22 of 1921 (\* No. 226) he was not satisfied with his own conducting. The manuscript score of the 1920 arrangement still has to be located. The majority of the manuscript parts were found in 1965 in the remnants of Webern's library in Perchtoldsdorf. These were transferred to the Moldenhauer (\* Hans Moldenhauer, biographer of Webern, 1978) Collection in Spokane, USA, which since the mid 1980's is housed in the *Paul Sacher Stiftung* in Basel. The cello and double bass parts were missing, and needed to be reconstructed. Edwin Haugan made a reconstruction in 1968, resulting in a first performance by ensemble *die reihe* in 1970 (probably still without double bass, although marked cues in the parts suggested that in 1921 a double bass was used, and in fact the typical *Verein* arrangements always used a double bass). Friedrich Cerha, composer and conductor of ensemble *die reihe*, provided a double bass part, which then was used for the published version of 1977. (\* UE 14778) After having heard the 1909 version during the rehearsals and the first performance in 1913, and after his experience of conducting the 1920 version six times in 1921, Webern started to revise Op. 6 in the summer of 1928. The wording which is used to describe Webern's work for this 1928 score shows various confusing forms: re-worked instrumentation (Webern) new instrumentation (Webern), reduction (Universal Edition) revision (Moldenhauer), rescoring (Moldenhauer), re-orchestration (Moldenhauer). Of all these options I think that the designation revision is the most appropriate. According to Webern's diary he started the revision of his Op. 6 in early August of 1928, and finished it on September 4. Three days later he handed the manuscript to UE. In a letter to Schoenberg of August 20 he writes: 'Everything extravagant is now cut (alto flute, six trombones for a few measures, and so on). Now I can present all this much more simply. Beforehand I had a discussion with Hertzka. He was very happy about my intention (the unusual orchestration was perhaps a contributing reason for the rare performances) and will publish the new edition already this autumn.' (\* This did not materialize) Also on August 20, Webern wrote to Alban Berg that the score now looked 'like an old Haydn score.' The revision actually was more extensive than it may seem from Webern's own descriptions, as it contains omitting of bars, reducing the orchestra by leaving out 13 musicians, changing the instrumentation, changing the dynamics and articulation and phrasings, as well as

adding metronome markings and changing the titles. The 1928 version uses an orchestra of 2 flutes (second flute doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons (second bassoon doubling contra bassoon), 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (same as in 1909 but without 'Rute'), celesta, harp and strings. (\* UE 12415, copyright 1956, first published 1958). In the days of his revising work on Op. 6 Webern was fascinated by the fact that Goethe had spent weeks to revise his poems, in order to improve the prosody. It was exactly that idea of 'musical prosody', which had occupied him so much in these pieces. The literature on Webern sometimes seems confused about certain facts, such as dates of performances, and this sometimes happens in one and the same publication. (\* In the focus of this essay it would be too absorbing to mention all the discrepancies.) Several sources mention that Webern conducted the 1928 version on two occasions. Once on April 4, 1932 in Barcelona with the Pau Casals Orchestra (with Schoenberg in the audience) and once on April 25, 1935, in London, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. And when Webern writes in a letter to Willi Reich in 1943: 'How long have I been waiting for a performance of these pieces!!!' he must have been referring to the waiting for other conductors than himself to perform Op. 6. A scheduled performance in Dortmund at the 63<sup>th</sup> *Tonkünstler Festival* of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein* in 1933 was cancelled for political reasons. In the *Zeitschrift für Musik* Webern published at this occasion a short commentary about his Op. 6, which he concludes with the following sentence: ' In 1928 the pieces received a new instrumentation, which, compared with the original version, represents a substantial simplification **and is to be considered the only valid one.**' (\* bold by the author) It is important to emphasize once more that Webern never witnessed a commercial publication of any of the three versions. In 1912, at the age of 29, he wrote: 'I have recently been rejected by publishers for the third time.' Significantly enough the 1928 version was the first to be published by UE in 1958. What reasons UE had to publish the 1909 version in 1961, is not known. The 1920 arrangement was published in 1977, twelve years after the manuscript was found. Based upon Webern's own words, it is my conviction that he would only have allowed the 1928 version to be published, and not the 1909 version. If had he lived long enough to witness the growing interest in his music in the late 40's and early 50's he would perhaps also have published the 1920 arrangement, particularly because of the dedication for his music which many new music ensembles displayed after WW II. Still today a Webern performance is a rare occasion. The Passacaglia Op. 1 is Webern's most performed work, probably because it is tonal and relatively easy to perform. This is true too for all of the posthumous works published in the 1960's, of which it remains uncertain if Webern would have allowed publication and performances. The present generation of performers seems to have little understanding of the value of Webern's output, in comparison with the earliest performers in Webern's days such as Eduard Steuermann and the Kolisch Quartett and with the later generation of performers such as Hermann Scherchen, Hans Rosbaud, Bruno Maderna, the Juilliard Quartet, the LaSalle Quartet, Maurizio Pollini, Alfred Brendel, Robert Craft, Pierre Boulez, Claudio Abbado, Zubin Mehta, and Daniel Barenboim, who were (and some still are) strong advocates for the music of the Second Viennese School. The rare exceptions in today's music life concerned with performing Webern are a few piano soloists, a few string quartets, and some ensembles for new music, such as the London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Modern and Klangforum Wien. They do perform Webern's demanding scores more often than any of the symphony orchestras, and therefore it is in my view not unlikely that Webern would have encouraged a good edition of his 1920 arrangement, in order to have his music performed and well rehearsed, with love and care. Webern's music continues to present rare and often rather extreme challenges to performing musicians, which is why it also offers such exceptional educational material, which is not at all recognised by many of today's music schools. Some of the recorded versions of Op. 6 display an unbelievably low standard of performing, for instance with regards to intonation and ensemble. Reputed performers such as the Berlin Philharmonic, and the conductors in those cases, do not maintain their standards of performing classical music when it comes to performing Webern. Webern himself was aware of the difficulties of his music, both technically and artistically. In a letter to Heinrich Jalowetz of ca. January 10, 1928 (\* No. 276) he writes: 'Monday 16 is the premiere of my Trio (\* String trio Op. 20). It is horribly difficult! I did expect that. But it will be good'. (\* Performed by members of the Kolisch Quartet, who were brilliant and dedicated advocates for the works of the Second Viennese School). Later he writes in the same letter: 'At the end of January Scherchen is doing my first orchestra pieces. If only I could conduct. First one has to let me interpret my things. You, Schoenberg, you know how to perform this, but nobody else.-' In the present score of the first version (1909) UE 13422, copyright 1961 (on the title page and the first page of score it says: '*Ursprüngliche Fassung*') appears a erratic remark from the publisher in German language, which reads translated: 'Anton Webern substantially reduced the instrumentation of his 1909 composed 6 Pieces for large orchestra'. (Copyright 1956). The editors at UE apparently had overseen that it was not just a reduction of forces, but also a substantial revision of the entire work. Still today UE states on their website that the 1909

version is the 'original' and the 1928 version (on title page and first page of score: '*Fassung von 1928*') the 'reduced' version. Both scores have the same preface, which is only valid and appropriate for the 1909 version. Adding to the confusion is the fact that UE gives on their website the 'original' a performance length of 12 minutes and the 'reduced' version only 10 minutes. Maybe this leads to assumptions of conductors and artistic directors of orchestras that the 'original' version is the composers preferred version, and that the 'reduced' version only serves as a more practical alternative, less expensive to produce, and even shorter. In today's performance practice there seems therefore to be confusion as to which version to use, although the majority of conductors does use the 1928 version. It could very well be the smaller orchestral forces that lead them to this choice. Much to my amazement conductors like Claudio Abbado and Pierre Boulez still used the 1909 version. In the case of Boulez this seems even more puzzling, since he withdraws sometimes his own works from previous publications, and keeps changing his own compositions, publishing newer versions, and withdrawing earlier published versions. Significant seems the choice of Herbert von Karajan for the 1928 version, as early as 1960, but then of course at that time the 1909 version had not yet appeared in print. Karajan nevertheless did stick to the 1928 version when he recorded Webern's Op. 6 for the 1975 Second Viennese School recordings by Deutsche Gramophon. Reading the literature on this work by Webern, looking closely at the scores and at the present state of performance practice of the three versions of Webern's Op. 6, I am convinced that only the 1928 version can be considered as the definitive orchestra version, that the 1909 version is maybe only of interest in a music-historical and musicological sense and that the 1920 chamber ensemble version (which in a way is a step between both orchestra versions, and which in general stays closer to the 1909 version) certainly deserves to be performed, as it is after all Webern's own arrangement, which he conducted six times. It is also my conviction though that this arrangement needs to be thoroughly revised according to the 1928 version. After having performed quite often the 1920 arrangement as a violist, I also conducted it several times. In summer and fall of 2012, when I started a new research project concerning the Society for Private Musical Performances in combination with rehearsals, performances and recordings, I carefully studied and compared both orchestra versions and the 1920 arrangement. Soon I realized that it would be entirely in the tradition of Webern's thinking to adopt Webern's changes of the 1928 score to the 1920 version. We know of similar cases in Webern's oeuvre (for instance the violin and piano pieces Op. 7) where he changed his manuscript considerably when handing it in for publication with UE. In the case of the string orchestra version of his Five Pieces for string quartet Op. 5, dating from the same period as his last version of Op. 6 (1928/1929), he made it clear that these were to be considered different versions, and that there obviously was no need to 'update' the original quartet version, which already had been published by UE and performed many times.

In the music of Schoenberg there are more examples of revisions and versions that until today cause confusion, for instance the two string orchestra arrangements/versions dating from 1917 and 1943 of the original string sextet *Verklärte Nacht* Op. 4, composed in 1899. Schoenberg obviously preferred the 1943 version, also because of his experiences with hearing, rehearsing and conducting this composition, which all must have contributed to the 1943 version. But the rental material of the first version from 1917 is still present in some orchestra libraries, so sometimes conductors do conduct the 1917 arrangement, often not even being aware that there is another version in existence, which is preferred by the composer. Even more complicated is the case of Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra Op. 16, like Webern's Op. 6 also dating from 1909, for which one seems to have the same choice between the 'original' version of 1909, or the 'reduced' version of 1949. Significantly enough there is also a chamber ensemble version by Schoenberg, dating from 1921. Performers of any of these three versions therefore have three scores to inform them about Schoenberg's intentions, with different metronome markings, different dynamics and articulations. There are many choices to be made.

For my performances and the CD recording in 2012 (released by Et'cetera, KTC 1483, 2014) I revised the 1920 arrangement in all aspects regarding the improvements or changes that Webern made in the 1928 version, such as tempo markings, instrumentation, articulation, phrasing, dynamics, omitted bars and omitted notes. A 'historical' approach would justify the performance of the 1920 version as we know it in the present UE publication, but I aim for a publication of my revision of the 1920 version, as I am now convinced that this is the 'only valid' way of presenting the music of Op. 6 in Webern's arrangement.

Appendix a) evaluation of the original 1920 arrangement, highlighting the particular choices in instrumentation that Webern made. (in progress)

Appendix b) list and evaluation of the changes of the 1928 version in comparison with the 1909 version (in progress)

Appendix c) a list of early performances of all three versions, from 1913 until 1935 (in progress)

Appendix d) selected discography of all three versions (in progress)

Appendix e) literature list

e)

- Falck, Robert (Canadian University Music Review, 1993) Anton Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra: A comparison of the two published versions
- Lichtenhahn, Ernst (editor) (Schott/ Publications of the Paul Sacher Stiftung, 1999) Anton Webern, Briefe an Heinrich Jalowetz
- Meyer, Felix (Paul Sacher Stiftung) Anton Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 6, Arrangement for Chamber Ensemble
- Moldenhauer, Hans (London, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1978) Anton von Webern, A Chronicle of his Life and Work
- Musik-Konzepte Sonderband(edition text + kritik,) Anton Webern I (1983), Anton Webern II (1984)