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*Harilaos Perpessa and The Quest for the Res Simplex: Notes on Arnold  
Schoenberg's Doubting Disciple*<sup>1</sup>

Regrettably, Harilaos Perpessa (1907 – 1995) is not to be found in the indices of most books on twentieth-century music.<sup>2</sup> The man, who used to sign his scores as ‘HP Aquarius’<sup>3</sup> led a life besides, despite, or even against his own age. Perpessa’s music has been occasionally described as ‘meta-romantic’;<sup>4</sup> as written in an ‘interesting musical idiom of persuasive power’ (Bruno Walter);<sup>5</sup> as owing much to Bruckner<sup>6</sup>, Strauss, Mahler, Debussy, and Ravel<sup>7</sup>.<sup>8</sup> In an article in the October 1938 issue of *Revue de musicologie* purporting to portray contemporary Greek musical life – a paragon, rather, of disinformation- National School composer Petro Petrides (1892 – 1977) reports: “Ch. Perpessa has, like many others, sacrificed to the gods of atonality [sic]”. (In the next phrase Petrides cites Skalkottas as merely the orchestral arranger of folk-dances).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the paper read at the conference “Arnold Schönberg und griechische Komponisten – in memoriam Iannis Xenakis”, Arnold Schönberg Center, Wien, 17-19 October 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Gradenwitz 1998 on Schoenberg’s ‘Meisterschüler’ is the exception that confirms the rule. Besides from that, Perpessa’s name is listed on the Index of the *MacDowell Fellows*, an artistic ‘colony’ created in 1907 by the American composer Edward MacDowell and his wife Marian, with other distinguished members being Amy Beach, Aaron Copland, and Leonard Bernstein. No further information on Perpessa could be elicited from the MacDowell website [last visit on 31 May 2010] (<http://www.macdowellcolony.org/index.html>).

<sup>3</sup> Perpessa was born in 10 May (1907), thus ‘Aquarius’ was not his zodiac sign. Why, then, did he choose another sign than his own (Taurus) as a *nome de plume*? I can think of only two, non mutually exclusive, reasons: a. ‘Aquarius’ stands for all kinds of futurist musings, ‘the age of Aquarius’ discussion being especially fashionable in theosophic cycles, allegedly hinted at by Christ in *Luke* 22, 10 (“[...] introeuntibus vobis in civitatem occurret vobis homo amphoram aquae portans sequimini eum in domum in qua intrat etc.”), b. ‘aqua perpessa’ is a key term in alchemistic literature, referring to the ‘substance that nourishes all things’ (see Georg von Welling [1655-1727], *Opus mago-cabbalisticum et theosophicum*, ed. by L. M. DuQuette (San Francisco: Red Wheel / Weiser, 2006): 532).

<sup>4</sup> Λεωτσάκος, Γιώργος. 'Περπέσας, Χαρίλαος', in *Μεγάλο Βιογραφικό Λεξικό*, : eds. Γ. Χριστόπουλος & Ι. Μπαστιάς. Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1991, vol. 8

<sup>5</sup> Peter Gradenwitz. *Arnold Schönberg und seine Meisterschüler. Berlin 1925 – 1933* (Wien: Peter Szolnay Verlag, 1998), 196.

<sup>6</sup> Gradenwitz, *Arnold Schönberg*, 196

<sup>7</sup> Λεωτσάκος, 'Περπέσας'

<sup>8</sup> All translations from Greek and German are mine.

<sup>9</sup> See the “Review of Periodicals” section in *Music & Letters* 19/4 (1938): 484.

The Leipzig-born Perpessa came in Greece in 1933, after studying music at a conservatory in Germany<sup>10</sup>, and in Schoenberg's master class 1927 and 1928 in Berlin. After the War, crippled (he had lost his left arm) and with poor career perspectives, he repeatedly attempted to start anew in the U.S. For this reason he turned to his old teacher, the only actual asset in his résumé, except for a Greek Academy Award he won in 1934 for his *Prelude and Fugue*. Schoenberg wrote in a recommendation letter in 11. 5.47 of his old student: "I remember ([...] not quite clearly) that he showed me compositions about in Stravinskys stile [sic]".<sup>11</sup> Perpessa felt almost alarmed by this remark and wrote back on 28 May of the same year: "Please omit the two last lines in your comments, I mean this about compositions in Strawinskys [sic] style, because there is not the slightest trace of such an influence in my music". In the same letter he presents himself as a composer to his teacher –some 20 years after they last met- with the following words: "I could perhaps sketch my style in the following words: Attempt to continue the work of Gustav Mahler. He is for me the great Messenger and Guide [Künder und Richtungsweiser], and this he was already in the time I joined You. It is this relation of mine to Mahler's work that revealed to me the significance of Your own work and made me seek for receiving lessons from you. And so it is at that time by You that I have laid the fundamentals to my knowledge and technical abilities and for this I am so grateful to You".<sup>12</sup>

During his lifetime his work was endangered, as George Leotsakos put it, only by himself: The only complete works that have been preserved, in microform only, are: *Preludium and Fugue* (1934), *Christus Symphony* (1950),<sup>13</sup> *The Dithyrambs of Dionysus* (before 1934); and his symphonic *Variations* on Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, as well as his *Symphonic Interpretation* of Beethoven's op. 127.<sup>14</sup> He reportedly destroyed the bulk of his work up to 1935, while after this date he kept

<sup>10</sup> Presumably in Leipzig; cf. item A: "he must have graduated from a German conservatory (which means/ something to me!) and I would not have accepted him, if I would not/ have thought that he is talented".

<sup>11</sup> In the Arnold Schönberg Center website:

[http://81.223.24.109/lettersneu/search\\_show\\_letter.php?ID\\_Number=4447](http://81.223.24.109/lettersneu/search_show_letter.php?ID_Number=4447) (visit date: 28 May 2010).

<sup>12</sup> 'Ich könnte vielleicht meinen Stil mit folg. Worten beschreiben: Versuch der Weiterführung des Werks Gustav Mahlers. Er ist für mich der grosse Künder und Richtungsweiser, war es schon zur Zeit als ich bei Ihnen war. Dieses mein Verhältnis zu Mahler war es auch, das mir die Bedeutung Ihres Werkes aufgeschlossen hatte und mich veranlasst hatte von Ihnen die Lehre entgegenzunehmen. So habe ich damals bei Ihnen den Grund zu meinem Wissen und meinen technischen Fertigkeiten gelegt und dafür bin ich Ihnen so sehr dankbar' (Letter from HP to AS, 28.5.1947).

<sup>13</sup> The *Christus Symphony* is the only Perpessa recorded work, so far as I know, see Arfanis 2000: 100.

<sup>14</sup> See Leotsakos 1991 and 2001 for dates and other information on Perpessa's ergo-biography. A copy of the microfilm, prepared by Gradenwitz while visiting Perpessa in the U.S. little before the latter's death, is preserved at the Music Library of Greece "Lilian Voudouri".

producing fewer musical works and more writings of a hermetic, theosophical style, interspersed with references to Wagner, Plato, the Presocratics, and the Bible.

What we have, in a nutshell, is the picture of a highly idiosyncratic artist, one plagued by metaphysical obsessions, leaving behind nothing more than music that actually belongs to an age *other* than his own; frankly, not to a future age, as he would rather have it (cf. “Aquarius”), but to a past one. In this paper I will try to modify slightly this picture in showing that Perpessa’s creative way *was* shaped, after all, by the example and teachings of Arnold Schoenberg, in a decisive, though oblique, manner.

In working toward this aim I had to rethink basic traits in the picture of Schoenberg the Theoretician, in an attempt to grasp the paradigmatic-change quality of his thought: this change I will describe in terms of a ‘semantic ascent’ (Quine) in talking on music. On the base of this, a final assessment of Perpessa’s creative way will be attempted, building on the affinity of Perpessa’s notion of ‘res simplex’ to the Schoenbergian ‘Gedanke’.

### *Influence?*

Perpessa is reported to have acknowledged Schoenberg’s influence in the following words: ‘One of the most important lessons I took from Schoenberg was objective self-analysis and self-criticism’ (according to the programme notes for the New York Philharmonic concerts of 4, 5, and 6 November 1948, in which Mitropoulos conducted Perpessa’s ‘Prelude and Fugue’).<sup>15</sup> From the same source we are informed that his music is indebted, to a certain degree, to Wagner, Mahler, and Ravel; that he is not a twelve-tone composer, that he has never abandoned tonality, and would never do so.<sup>16</sup>

To be sure, the wording of Perpessa’s acknowledgement does leave room for the possibility to acknowledge Schoenberg’s influence on other matters as well; As surely as his disclaimer on twelve-tone music and tonality leaves no room for the assumption of any influence whatsoever in his musical language. What might then these matters be? A fairly evident answer to this question would be: ‘theosophy’.

I will not linger on this aspect of Schoenberg’s personality in this context; suffice it to cite the descriptive definition of theosophy by Walther Klein, in his article

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<sup>15</sup> Gradenwitz, Arnold Schönberg, 190

<sup>16</sup> Gradenwitz, Arnold Schönberg, 190

“Das theosophische Element in Schönbergs Weltanschauung” in the September 1924 special issue of the *Musikblätter des Anbruchs* celebrating Schönberg’s fiftieth birthday: “...theosophy means the spirituality that forms the basis of wisdom in all great cultures, ancient and modern. The science of the Egyptian priests was theosophy; the Taoteking of Laotse, the indian Vedas and Upanishads were theosophy no less; theosophy was the teaching of Gautama Buddha, the philosophy of Plato, Gnosis, Neo-platonism, and early christianism; [theosophy was] the mysticism of Jacob Boehme, Goethe’s *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister* and Wagner’s *Parsifal*”; and Klein adds: “If we were to designate the place on the globe of the spiritual world, where Arnold Schönberg’s is at home, then we would need no more than simply and plainly asserting: *Schönberg is a theosophist*” (author's emphasis).<sup>17</sup>

Surely, as beyond doubt the existence of the theosophic element in both Schoenberg and Perpessa may lie, this might not be the result of *influence*. In lack of other evidence, it could be a mere similarity; an inclination inbuilt in the personalities of both composers. The comparison between Perpessa and Schoenberg becomes interesting only after we consider the connection of Perpessa’s theosophy to his notion of ‘res simplex’, as well as the connection of the latter to Schoenberg’s notion of the ‘musikalischer Gedanke’. I will start by looking first into Perpessa’s ‘res simplex’, then to Schoenberg’s ‘Gedanke’, to finally arrive at a modified picture of both.

*Res simplex = Idea = Gedanke*

In the commentary with which he has provided his arrangement of Beethoven’s Eighth Symphony, Perpessa writes, commenting on the fourth movement: “The Simple is the unexpected part, it is indivisible and of one essence. The thing is simplex. Plato says: the work is not brought to fulfilment if it does not end in the Simple. ‘res simplex’ is the Platonic ‘idea’”. The reference is to the distinction in *Phaedon* 78b of all things into ‘composite’ (σύνθετα) and ‘simple’ (αζύνητα), Platonic Ideas being ‘simple’.<sup>18</sup> Perpessa returns often to the notion of ‘simplicity’ in

<sup>17</sup> Klein, Walther, 'Das theosophische Element in Schönbergs Weltanschauung' in *Sonderheft der Musikblätter des Anbruch Arnold Schönberg zum fünfzigsten Geburtstage 13.*, September 1924, 273

<sup>18</sup> Perpessa’s Latin (‘res simplex’) suggests that his idea on ‘Idea’ might have been mediated by readings of relevant passages in Leibniz. Leibniz took sides with Plato in his advocacy of the ‘idées innées’, and had a lifelong concern with problems of compositeness vs. simpleness or as Dietmar Till succinctly puts it: “the mediation of indivisibility and reality” (Till 1996: 153) (which eventually led him to the formulation of his *monades*-notion). This, again, is similar to Schoenberg’s chief preoccupation

his commentaries on other Beethoven symphonies (to be found as a continuation of his commentaries which introduce his arrangement to the Eighth), e.g. on the Fourth: “very touching, speaking directly to the heart, is the otherworldly beauty of the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, and this is brought about with the most simple of means”; in these very words it is said of the 3<sup>rd</sup>: “The second subject has a rare beauty and B[eethoven] achieves this with the simplest of means”; and he concludes: “Indeed, when somebody has ideas, he should have no fear of the Simple, ideas have a spontaneous effect”. If Beethoven’s music is for Perpessa the ultimate realization of his ‘res simplex’ ideal, modern music *in toto* occupies the opposite pole: “[m]odern music is ‘res complex’ and this is its flaw. Complexity with all its forces is unable to fascinate the listener; he yawns and feels repulsed.” In other words, Perpessa’s renunciation of Schoenberg is based on his identification of the Idea with the ‘res simplex’ and of Schoenberg’s music with the ‘res complex’. However, while this renunciation has rather heavy consequences regarding his musical idiom, this does not need be so regarding Schoenberg’s theosophy or, what is more important, the very notion of an Idea as the ‘essence’ underlying and gluing together the individual moments of a musical work. I will have more to say on Perpessa’s Idea, after having going through Schoenberg’s ‘Gedanke’ and what it stands for in Schoenberg’s overall approach to both composition and theorizing on music.

### *Gedanke*

The tension between complexity and comprehensibility is a theme in both the critical reception of Schoenberg’s music<sup>19</sup> (from Adorno’s note on *Von Heute auf Morgen* and Berg’s “Why is Schoenberg’s Music so Difficult to Understand?” to the monograph of Manuel Gervink) and in Schoenberg’s writings on his own music. His absolute faith in the laws of musical evolution made him reluctant to compromise

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in his ‘idea’, and later, ‘series’ notion, a fact only emphasized by the latter’s subaltern notions of ‘Fasslichkeit’ and ‘Zusammenhang’.

Of course, the quest for unity is a perennial compositional concern, tangible at least *since* the cyclic mass of the fifteenth century; *from* composers so mainstream as the Viennese classics (motivic development) *to* peripheral mavericks as Mantzaros (his ‘law of unity’). The last in the series of great composers to deal with the issue was Schoenberg, but he had to struggle with the aporias of a newfound musical language; not so Perpessa, who, on the contrary, could combine metaphysical fervor and stout revisionism, all in the name of his ‘res simplex’/unity ideal.

<sup>19</sup> Fontaine, Susanne, "Haben Sie doch endlich den Mut ihr eigenes Leben zu leben!". Arnold Schönbergs Einakter "von heute auf morgen", in: *Arnold Schönberg 'Von heute auf morgen' – Elliott Carter 'What next?'. Zwei Einakter. Herausgegeben von der Staatsoper Unter den Linden Berlin.* Frankfurt: Insel, 1999, 31 – 47.

complexity (which he was sure that people will be able to tackle more and more as they evolve) for comprehensibility (which they missed because for not being evolved enough). This, I think, explains why he was capable at the same time to aim, say, at a success bigger than the one of *Das Wunder der Heliane* by Erich Korngold and write music of the complexity of *Von Heute auf Morgen*.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, Schoenberg's key- terms for referring to his ideal of a musical language were 'Zusammenhang' (coherence) and 'Fasslichkeit' (comprehensibility), which, to Schoenberg, represent the two 'principles of presentation' [Prinzipien der Darstellung] of the 'musikalischer Gedanke'.<sup>21</sup>

No account of Schoenberg's musical achievement, so far as I know, has succeeded so far in reconciling this apparent contradiction between his ideal of 'Gedanke' (with the subserving principles of 'Zusammenhang' and 'Fasslichkeit') and the actual difficulty of understanding that confronts his listeners from Berg to the present day (to which partly the element of unabated challenge in his music is owed). Perpassa's choice to classify Schoenberg under 'res complex', can be seen as an all too easy but nevertheless clear and, by no means, unjustifiable reaction.

I believe that we do miss the point in Schoenberg's theoretic and compositional achievement either by negatively reacting to the contradiction, like Perpassa and others, or by not thematizing it at all. Still, Schoenberg's accounts of his way to twelve-tone music bear ample evidence to the kind of change -in practical and theoretical attitudes toward composition- he had in mind *and* to the extent of this change; a change enough to draw a line between twelve-tone music and all other music before this, including his own non-dodecaphonic works. What I think is needed, is a concrete background against which Schoenberg's linguistic formulations on twelve-tone music and choice of words can assume a more coherent and straightforward meaning. I think a favourable background can be sought in the parallel direction of a discussion going on since the end of nineteenth, and well into the twentieth century, around the importance of *language* in philosophy together with certain evolutions in philosophical logic. This is a road leading -in inverted order- from Quine to Carnap back to the pioneering work of Gottlob Frege. To sketch but a first approach of what seems to me a promising but vast field of research I will bring in arguments from Schoenberg's texts pointing to the direction indicated, namely that

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<sup>20</sup> Letter to Josef Rufer, cited in Fontaine, "Haben...", 42.

<sup>21</sup> See Jacob, on Schoenberg's "Der musikalische...". 461

Schoenberg's turn to dodecaphony represents a paradigmatic change that can be best described in terms of a 'semantic ascent', the term that Quine used for accounting for Frege's 'achievement', i.e. the 'full formalization of logic'.<sup>22</sup>

### *Semantic Ascent*

The 'musikalischer Gedanke', the musical idea that provides for 'Zusammenhang' and 'Fasslichkeit' in a work of music, is secured through the formalistic principles of twelve-tone theory. "A musical idea", stresses Erwin Stein in the concluding lines of his 'Neue Formprinzipien', in the same 1924 issue of *Anbruch*, "can be presented, expressed only as *form* and only as *form* it can be perceived and impressed upon".<sup>23</sup>

I will concentrate on two points made by Schoenberg on different occasions: The first, in his text "Musikalischer Gedanke und die Logik, Technik und Kunst seiner Darstellung" (p. 90 of the ms.).<sup>24</sup>

Here the attempt is undertaken for the first time to extrapolate a *musical logic* from the facts of the musical technique of presentation of ideas (Schoenberg's emphasis)<sup>25</sup>

The second is found in a note titled 'Merkmale der Logik' [characteristics of Logic] of 1932:

Here [in the case of a *new art*] the composer can work only by relying upon his feeling of form and his inborn logic.

And in a manuscript on the same subject –i.e. the 'Gedanke' - dated 1931:

Musical thought is subject to the *laws and conditions of all other thought* and it has additionally to take in account the conditions that derive from the [musical] material.<sup>26</sup>

I suggest that we should take Schoenberg's use of the word 'Logik', and of words like 'Fasslichkeit', 'Zusammenhang', and 'Gedanke' not in a metaphoric, loose sense, as it is usually done so far, but in a more literal, which in our case means: a more *Fregean*, sense. In his monograph "Der Gedanke" Frege writes: "In thinking we do not *produce*

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<sup>22</sup> Willard Van Orman Quine. *Word and Object* (Cambridge: MIT, c1960), 273

<sup>23</sup> Klein, 'Das theosophische Element...', 303

<sup>24</sup> Neff, Severine and Patricia Carpenter (eds.), *Arnold Schoenberg: The Musical Idea: And The Logic, Technique, And Art Of Its Presentation*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995)

<sup>25</sup> Neff and Carpenter, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 462

<sup>26</sup> Neff and Carpenter, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 469

[erzeugen] ideas, we comprehend them [fassen]”.<sup>27</sup> It is the Fregean perspective that brings out fully the specific meaning of the word ‘Fasslichkeit’ in Schoenberg. ‘Fasslichkeit’ is a word that does not refer to the listener but principally to the composer: It is because the laws of composition are seen as subservient to the laws of human understanding in general that to compose is to construct a ‘Gedanke’; And for the same reason to construct a ‘Gedanke’ is to comprehend (*fassen*) an objective value.

Twelve-tone theory served Schoenberg as a means for the *formalization* of music language. The semantic ascent is exactly this step toward abstraction, or, to paraphrase Quine: ‘the shift from talking of [note] to talk of [‘note’].<sup>28 29</sup> Twelve-tone theory allows Schoenberg to avoid discussion of musical *contents*, in terms of relations between concrete pitches, let alone in terms of concrete notes denoting extra-musical ‘moods and pictures’<sup>30</sup>, and shift talk to ‘notes’, in other words, possible ‘operations’ on ‘notational forms’ (Quine again!), e.g. arrangements of pitch-classes.<sup>31</sup> The focus in ‘operations on notational forms’ rather than content opened up a vast field which includes the substitution of notes by numbers (as a ‘shorthand for sound’; this is a phrase of Lester Tribble, referring to the Schoenberg American-disciple Adolph Weiss<sup>32</sup>), the construction of tables, and everything else known to belong to the preparatory stadium of twelve-tone composition. The theory’s relation to formal logic was thrown even more drastically into relief by Allen Forte’s set-analysis system, a system ‘in fact almost entirely cognate with the principles of serial composition established by Schoenberg’.<sup>33</sup> It is precisely the mark of logic –what I referred to as the semantic ascent in theorizing on music- that draws a clear line between twelve-tone music and Schoenberg’s own ‘atonal theory’, one the one hand; all other similar attempts, on the other; e.g. the effort of Matthias Hauer, of whom it

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<sup>27</sup> Frege, Gottlob, “Der Gedanke”, in: *Logische Untersuchungen*, ed. Günther Patzig. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986, 50

<sup>28</sup> Quine, *Word and Object*, 271

<sup>29</sup> Quine’s own example is mile and ‘mile’.

<sup>30</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, “Composition with Twelve Tones (1)”, in: *Style and Idea*, ed. L. Stein. London: Faber & Faber, c1975, 216

<sup>31</sup> This is the reason that Pitch Class Set theory is a natural way to talk about this kind of music.

<sup>32</sup> Weiss, Adolph, ‘A New Notation and Methods of Its Practical Application’, *Bulletin of the American Musicological Society* 6 (1942): 28 - 30

<sup>33</sup> Anthony Pople. *Berg: Violin Concerto, Cambridge Music Handbooks*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 68



can be said, in this vein, that he avoided semantic ascent by sticking to the material level, as testified by his exhaustive description of modes.<sup>34</sup>

### *Back to Perpessa's Idea*

The paradigmatic change effected by Schoenberg's work is such that no one after him can easily escape being either *for* or *against* it, whether explicitly or not. Let us take the example of postmodernism in music: In the light of the preceding remarks, the common thread running through different manifestations of postmodernism (minimal or repetitive music, neo-romanticism, collage techniques, various crossovers etc.) can be described as a 'semantic *descent*' down to a musical domain of concrete musical *material* consisting in older idioms and/or *objets trouvés*; a renewed appeal for notes rather than 'notes'; a general urge to break down the unitary and 'authoritative' discourse, as it were, of an abstract musical logic. However, what makes these musics 'postmodern', as opposed to, plainly, 'conservative', is that, to stick to the introduced terminology, they represent a 'semantic descent', which *presupposes* the 'ascent' of the Schoenbergian musical logic.

Under this aspect, Perpessa's music represents as much a case of musical conservatism, in his explicit reject of Schoenberg's music and his undeterred loyalty to a Mahler-like idiom, as it represents a musical *proto-post-modernism* (rather than just 'meta-romantic' (Leotsakos)), in his exposure to the Schoenbergian example, which led him to a musical result dramatically unlike Schoenberg's but nevertheless heavily indebted to his master's notion of the 'musikalischer Gedanke'. It seems that the 'Idea' finally took over, turning into obsession, literally obliterating every form of musical expression, even the one of an obsolete kind that served Perpessa up to the middle of his life (c. 1950).

Both the original debt to and the subsequent 'platonist' deviation from the Schoenbergian example are illustrated in Perpessa's use of the idea of 'idea' *against* his master, epigrammatically: the Idea is 'simplex'; good music is simple (Beethoven); dodecaphony (and the 'Gedanke') is 'complex'; therefore, twelve-tone music is bad (Schoenberg).

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<sup>34</sup> For a comparison of Schoenberg's dodecaphony and atonality with those of other contemporaries see Covach, John. 'Twelve-Tone Theory', in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 611

On the other hand, I believe that we can see Perpessa's growing obsession with traditional masterpieces like Beethoven's Eighth and Bach's *Kunst der Fuge* as follows: it was the contradiction of addressing the future by ignoring the present that unequivocally led Perpessa to the dead end of literally *rewriting* the past.<sup>35</sup> If seen so, his quest for the 'res simplex' did not *end*, in the sense which all quests end: either finding or not the desired object; it did not end even in the sense that his quest was interrupted by death; before that, it merely run out of power, in the struggle against the actual musical challenges of his age, as exemplified in the theoretical and musical work of the Schoenberg circle and the post-war generation.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. his actual rewritings of Beethoven works, enough to earn him the title of the 'Pierre Menard of music'!



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## Appendix<sup>36</sup>

The following letters are kept in the Schoenberg Centre in Vienna. Except from Perpessa's letters to and from Schoenberg, included are here the recommendation letter Schoenberg addressed to the Juilliard School of Music in favor of Perpessa (item A); the letter sent by Ernst Praetorius to Erwin Stein, introducing to the latter Perpessa's *Preludium* (it was Perpessa himself who sent this letter to Schoenberg).

A| Recommendation letter for Perpessa by Arnold Schoenberg to the Juilliard School of Music.

JUILLIARD SCHOOL OF MUSIC/ WILLIAM SCHUMAN, DIRECTOR/120 CLAREMONT AVENUE, NEW YORK 27, N. Y. //FORM TO BE FILLED IN BY THE APPLICANT'S PRESENT OR MOST RECENT TEACHER IN THE MAJOR STUDY// THIS FORM WILL BE PRESENTED TO YOU BY *Harilaos Perpessa*// WHO HAS APPLIED TO THE JUILLIARD SCHOOL OF MUSIC FOR SCHOLARSHIP EXAMINATION. WILL YOU PLEASE FILL IN THE FORM AND RETURN IT EITHER TO THE APPLICANT OR MAIL IT DIRECTLY TO THE OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS BEFORE JUNE 15. PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT WE APPRECIATE YOUR KIND COOPERATION.// 1. DOES THE APPLICANT MEET YOUR APPROVAL? *Yes*/ 2. HOW LONG HAS THE APPLICANT STUDIED UNDER YOU? *One year (1930 – 1931)*/ 3. WHAT IS YOUR ESTIMATE OF THE APPLICANT'S QUALIFICATIONS? (a) *Musical [:] I assume that he is musical and gifted for composition*// (b) *Personal [:] I liked him, he was natural and quite lively/ and intelligent. I had the impression that he is idealistic/ and wants to do the best.*// 4. COMMENTS *Since it is about 16 years that Mr. Harilaos Perpessa was/ a pupil of my Masterclasses at the Academy of Arts to Berlin, and/ I have probably seen in this time quite a few hundred of more or/ less talented students – you will understand that I have only a/ faint recollection of him. But as these have been masterclasses,/ he must have graduated from a German conservatory (which means/ something to me!) and I would not have accepted him, if I would not/ have thought that he is talented- and I was independent in this respect. I remember (also not quite clearly) that he showed me/ compositions about in Stravinsky style./* 5. This statement is made by *Arnold Schoenberg* [signature]/ ADDRESS *Arnold Schoenberg/ 116 Rockingham Avenue/ Los Angeles, Calif./ Phone Arizona 35077* [seal] [follows empty form TO BE FILLED IN BY OTHER MUSICIANS]

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<sup>36</sup> Transcription and commentary by Panos Vlagopoulos

B| Letter from Schoenberg to Perpessa, 11 May 1947

Arnold Schoenberg/ 116 N. Rochingham Avenue/ Los Angeles 24, California/  
U.S.A.//

Mr. Harilaos Perpessa/ c/O Near East Foundation/ 4 Blvd. Queen Sophias/ Athens –  
Greece//

Dear Mr. Perpessa:/ Enclosed the form you sent me./ I have answered all the  
questions as well/ as I could, regarding the long time which has/ elapsed since I saw  
you last or heard from you.// By the way: have you not been with me earlier than/  
1930? I would guess it was 1926 or 1927?// Let me hear whether you succeeded with  
your/ application.// Very kindly greeting you, I am/ yours sincerely// May 11, 1947  
[unsigned]

Athens, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1947.// Dear Mr. Schoenberg.// Sie haben mir mit Ihren lieben Seiten eine grosse Freude/ bereitet. Ich hatte meinen Brief von 28.4. absichtlich kurz gehalten/ und nicht viel von mir erwähnt, da ich keine grosse Hoffnung hatte,/ dass nach so vieljähriger meiner Abwesenheit aus Ihrem Gesichtskreis/ Sie sich meiner noch mit Bestimmtheit erinnern könnten, und ich bin/ umso bewegter, als Sie sich meiner guten Züge noch genauestens erin-/nern.// Gestatten Si emir deshalb Ihnen einiges von mir mitzuteilen,/ um die langjährige Unterbrechung unserer Beziehungen wieder zu über-/ bracken und nach meiner Ankunft in den U.S. die Möglichkeit zu haben,/ meine Beziehungen zu Ihnen intensive zu gestalten, als es mir da-/ mals möglich war.// Der vorzeitige Abbruch meiner Studien bei Ihnen war durch/ die erschwerte wirtschaftliche Lage meiner Eltern verursacht. In/ den darauf folg. Jahren, hatte ich mich, soweit es mir die Umstände/ getatteten, selbst musikalisch weitergebildet. Im Jahre 33 bin ich/ nach Athen übergesiedelt, habe mich 34 an einem Preisausschreiben/ der Akademie von Athen für die beste Orchesterkomposition beteiligt/ und hatte den 1. Preis erhalten. Diese Komposition ist von dem Athener Symphonie-Orchester unter Leitung von Mitropoulos aufgeführt worden./ Seitdem habe ich einige Kompositionen geschrieben, die wie ich glaube/ nicht schlecht sind und Ihre Anerkennung finden würden. Ich erlaube/ mir Ihnen die Kopie eines Briefes, den Dr. Ernst Praetorius im Jahre/ 39 an Boosey & Hawkes in London geschrieben hat, beizulegen./ Praetorius war vor dem Hitlerregime Generalmusikdirektor in Weimar/ und nachher Leiter des Symphonieorchesters in Ankara, das zurzeit/ als ich dort war (39) zu Hälfte aus deutschen und deutsch-jüdischen/ Emigranten bestand. Praetorius hatte mit diesem Orchester eine/ hervorragend gute Aufführung meiner Orchesterkomposition Praeludium/ & Fuge herausgebracht. In gleicher Weise habe ich auch durch/ Bronislaw Hubermann Anerkennung gefunden, der in einem Konzert, das/ ich hier in Athen im Jahre 37 dirigiert habe, anwesend war. Ich/ teile Ihnen das mit um Gewährsmänner zu nennen auf deren Urteil/ Sie sich gerne verlassen wollen.// Ein Komponist in meinem Alter – ich bin jetzt 40 – wenn er/ etwas zu sagen hat, hat natürlich seinen eigenen Stil. Ich könnte/ Ihnen vielleicht meinen Stil mit folg. Worten umschreiben: Versuch/ der Weiterführung des Werkes Gustav Mahlers. Es ist für mich der/ grosse Künder und Richtungsweiser, war es schon zur Zeit als ich/ bei Ihnen war. Dieses mein Verhältnis zu Mahler war es auch, das/ mir die Bedeutung Ihres Werkes aufgeschlossen hatte und mich ver-/anlasst hatte von Ihnen die Lehre entgegenzunehmen. So habe ich/ damals bei Ihnen den Grund zu meinem Wissen und technischen/ Fertigkeiten gelegt und dafür bin ich Ihnen sosehr dankbar.// Since the end of the war I have been trying to go to/ America. In February 1946 the above mentioned Prelude & Fugue was / performed here. It had found the enthusiastic appreciation of a/ most cultivated American, one of those conspicuous who/ represent the same spirit as the one expressed in Mr. Koussevitzky's/ speech held on the occasion of a concert of the League of Composers {Page 2} in New York in January. His name is Archer. He is Director of the/ Near East Foundation in Athens. After the concert he approached me/ of his own accord and in this way we became friends. On this occasion/ Mr. Archer felt touched by the fact of my war-disablement (loss of/ my left arm as a result of shellfire). With his assistance I have/ been endeavoring for nearly a year to come to the states by means/ of a scholarship of one of the American musical institutes. Now/ I have the intention to attend a course of orchestra conducting at/ the Juilliard.// Simultaneously with your letter I received a letter from/ Mitropoulos in reply to my inquiry about his opinion for the pros-/pects of getting my

scholarship granted. His letter enclosed a letter from Mrs. Finch, director of admissions of the Juilliard, addressed to him. This letter is, to say the truth, not very encouraging. Mitropoulos in his recommendation letter asked for a scholarship to be granted at once. Juilliard however demand that I first have to undergo the examinations before the jury will decide on granting me the scholarship. I have not the intention to overrule this regulation. But the Embassy here in Athens can give me the entrance visa only on the ground of a definite invitation on the part of Juilliard. So I am prevented to come there. What can I do in this case? I thought it over and the following suggestion occurred to me. But I am afraid I will need your friendly assistance. Could you write to Mr. Schuman, president of the Juilliard, a guarantee letter for me, which could serve as a basis to send me at once a definite invitation. This letter, to be well understood, shall not intend to eliminate the examinations. I am willing to undergo them and in case of my failing the school will of course have the right to withdraw the scholarship. Another way to obtain here my U.S.A. entrance visa does not exist. If you decide to write such a letter, you will have all the necessary collaboration on the part of Mr. Archer and Mr. Mitropoulos. Mr. Archer with whom I spoke to-day [sic] about this matter, found it an excellent idea and asked me to write you at once. His opinion was not to rely only upon Juilliard, but to undertake the same step with the New England Conservatory in Boston. Mr. Allen, director of this conservatory is already familiar with my cause as you can see from the correspondence enclosed of October 30, 1946. Mr. Archer is to-day writing a letter to Mr. Allen. He hopes that the prospects are no more favourable than last year. I should ask you, in case you agree, to write three similar letters, one to Koussevitzky, one to Allen and one to Juilliard. In the first case there also exists the possibility of obtaining an assistance of the Koussevitzky Music Foundation. Perhaps I will now succeed with your help. // Please believe that I dare to cause you this trouble only because it is absolutely necessary for me to succeed in this matter as you will see from the letter of Mitropoulos to Mr. Archer of November 20, 1946. // By the way, you are right. I studied with you in the years 27 and 28 and not as I stated erroneously, in 30 and 31. [page 3] I am sending back to you the forms signed by you, so that you make a more concrete statement about my musical abilities in your letter of recommendation to the Juilliard, now after you have won a thorough insight in my cause. // Please omit the last two lines in your comments, I mean this about compositions in Stravinsky's style, because there is not the slightest trace of such an influence in my music. This could wrongly show that there was no great connection between us. This is due to my fault, as I should have informed you more fully in my first letter. // Please accept my excuses for causing you so much trouble. I am really pained to dispose in this way of your precious time. // Expressing herewith my most heartfelt gratitude. I remain with my deepest reverence. // Yours very sincerely. // [signature] Harilaos Perpessa // c/O Near East Foundation/ 4 Blvd. Queen Sophias/ Athens - Greece



D| Letter from Perpessa to Schoenberg, 1 June 1947

Athens, the 1<sup>st</sup> June, 1947.// Dear Mr. Schoenberg.// Quite unexpectedly I yesterday received the letter/ of admission from the Juilliard School.<sup>37</sup> This letter is all I/ need to obtain my entrance visa to the U. S. Thus the quarantee/ letter I asked you for in my last letter is not any more necessary.// On the other hand this letter of admission does not/ solve all my difficulties. This scholarship covers only the/ tuition fees and not my living expenses. For this reason your/ letters of recommendation to Mr. Koussevitzky and Mr. Allen,/ Director of the New England Conservatory in Boston respectively,/ become of the highest importance. I have the intention to/ show Mr. Koussevitzky some of my Compositions and he may per-/ haps decide to grant me an allowance out of the Koussevitzky/ Music Foundation. Furthermore Mr. Allen is also member of the/ Greek War Relief of Boston which likewise may find it suitable/ to extend a monetary assistance to a Greek composer.// I hope to hear from you soon about the letters of/ recommendation and shall from my part write you from time to/ time how thinks [sic] proceed with me. I take the opportunity of/ thanking you once more most cordially for all the precious assistance on your part, and remain most devoted//yours very sincerely// [signature] Harilaos Perpessa// Please address: c/o Near East Foundation/ 4 Blvd. Queen Sophias [sic]/ Athens – Greece.

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<sup>37</sup> In the few days since the letter of 28 May Perpessa received the admission letter from the Juilliard. Nevertheless, he wants that Schoenberg writes two more recommendation letters, to Koussevitzky and Allen. No such letter by Schoenberg is known. It seems to be the case that Schoenberg thought this went a little too far, more even so because it came from somebody he did not actually remember. Moreover, it seems that while Perpessa sent Schoenberg positive assessments of his work, e.g. by Ernst Praetorius (see Item E), he was rather reluctant to send Schoenberg any actual sample of his work. Instead, he almost taunted Schoenberg for making an official statement about his alleged similarity with Stravinsky's style (see previous letter).

E| Letter by Ernst Praetorius<sup>38</sup> to Erwin Stein, 12 November 1939<sup>39</sup>

KOPIE

12.11.1939  
Ihr Schreiben  
vom 1/11/39  
Ref. No. 3/ES/BR

Boosey and Hawkes Ltd., 295 Regent Street, London W1

Sehr geehrte Herren, insonderheit Dr. Stein.<sup>40</sup>/Verbindlichsten Dank für Ihren Brief vom 1/11/39, der gestern in/ meine Hände gelangte. Die Post scheint also auch ausserhalb Deutschlands jetzt überall die nötige Verspätung zu haben.//...Persönliches und das Orchester betreffendes: Ich bin jetzt ge-/radevier Jahre als Chefdes türkischen Staatsorchesters in Ankara und habe eben wieder einen neuen mehrjährigen Vertrag mit der/ Türkeiion gleicher Eigenschaft geschlossen, nur mit der Erweiterung/ dass ich gleichzeitig die musikalische Oberleitung der Opernschule/übernommen habe.//Das Orchester giebt wöchentlich 3 Konzerte und zwar Dienstag und/ Freitag um 8.15 M.E.Z. im Radyo Ankara, die auf kurzer und länger/ Welle gesendet warden und meistens etwas leichten Charakters/ sind, sowie jeden Sonnabend Nachmittag ein Symphoniekonzert auch/ mit neueren Sachen. So ist beispielsweise das Programm des nächs-/ten Konzertesam 18/1/39: Moniuszko: Bajka uvertüre [sic] , Charilaos/ Perpessa: Praeludium und Fuge für grosses Orchester, Tschaikowski:/ 6. Symph.//Ich lege Wert darauf dass die Konzerte nicht über 1 ½ Stunden/ dauern, mache z.B. manchmal in einem Konzert nicht weiter, als/ eine Bruckner Symph. (Nb. Die ersten 6 haben schon unter meiner/ Leitung ihre türkische Uraufführung erlebt!// Ich möchte übrigens bei dieser Gelegenheit Sie auf den Komponisten/ Perpessa (Grieche)aufmerksam machen, dessen oben erwähntes Werk/ (op. 3) eines der stärksten ist, die mir in meiner langen Laufbahn/ vorgekommen sind. Wenn Sie Interesse dafür hätten, könnte ich/ Ihnen nach der Aufführung die Partitur zur Ansicht zugehen lassen.

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Mit hochzüglicher Hochachtung/ Ihr sehr ergebener/ Praetorius

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<sup>38</sup> Ernst Praetorius (1880 -1946): German conductor and musicologist, sent by Hindemith in 1935 to Ankara to escape problems with the Nazi regime (his wife was Jewish) and to take over the Ankara State Orchestra, as part of by the Hindemith's modernization of Turkey's music education project. Praetorius stayed in his post until his death in 1946. Praetorius is possible that knew the *Prelude* from Mitropoulos, who conducted the Academy Price awarded composition in Athens.

<sup>39</sup> This is the letter referred to in Perpessa's letter to Schoenberg of 28 May 1947.

<sup>40</sup> Erwin Stein (1885 – 1958), friend and pupil Schoenberg's (cf. Stein 1924), he fled to London after the *Anschluss* (1938), where he became music editor to *Boosey & Hawkes*.