

Introduction

This book began as a research project with an entirely different focus: to study the impact of the 12-tone method of composition on the British musical scene in the first post-war decade, before the technique came into widespread use by British composers, as internationally. While doing background work, I was surprised to find that standard historical accounts suggested that the influence of the Second Viennese School on British musicians was virtually nil before the mid-1950s. For instance, Peter J. Pirie, in his general history, *The English Musical Renaissance*, published in 1979, described Schoenberg's influence in England at the time of his death in 1951 as 'minimal, only Humphrey Searle and Elizabeth Lutyens among native composers acknowledging his example or his influence'.¹

Searle and Lutyens were the first English composers to adopt the 12-tone technique, both having begun to experiment with it around 1939. In later writings, they were bitter about the compositional environment in which they had developed, stressing the sparsity of information and dearth of performances or published scores of 12-tone works in Britain at that time. The lack of acceptance, interest or support for their music and ideas had led to ostracization and isolation. In 1972, Searle described this period in bleak terms.

There were relatively few performances of new works. Walter Goehr, a former pupil of Schoenberg, put on some concerts of new and unfamiliar works. Edward Clark, secretary of the ISCM's British section, was also able to give some concerts of contemporary music during the war. After the War, despite the fact that the BBC Third Programme was inaugurated in 1946, even modern classics were rarely heard. Stravinsky was usually represented only by his first three ballets; Bartók was seldom played and Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, the so-called second Viennese school, were hardly heard at all, either on radio or in concert halls.²

In her autobiography written the same year, Elisabeth Lutyens claimed to have discovered the 12-tone technique for herself around 1939, and attributed her initial failures as a professional composer to it.

Apparently it is not un-English to study Palestrina and Bach at every musical institution; to be influenced by Brahms, Hindemith, or Bartók; but to adopt a technique, like the 12-tone, associated with a German, Schoenberg (albeit

that, earlier, I had thought I had 'discovered' it myself, from my study of Purcell), was 'mittel-European', un-English and iconoclastic. I was soon made to feel like a Communist before the Committee for Un-American Activities. Performances in England grew fewer and fewer till for some twenty years they were almost non-existent.³

Lutyens also complained that she had access to few performances and fewer scores until after the war.

[Lutyens] firmly maintained that in the beginning she came to serial methods by herself. In 1939, she claimed, she had never even encountered the expression 'twelve-tone'. She had heard only the *Gurrelieder* of Schoenberg, which she detested, and a limited amount of Webern – the String Trio Op. 20 and possibly the Five Movements for String Orchestra, and his cantata *Das Augenlicht*, performed at the ISCM Festival in London in 1938. This certainly had a devastating impact; her immediate reaction was that here was the 'guiding spirit to all future music'. But she insisted that she had had no opportunity to study a score, and had in fact seen no Webern score until 1948.⁴

Since Schoenberg's music had been performed and his ideas and activities widely written about in Europe and the United States before the war, I wondered why and how Britain had remained isolated from this controversial phenomenon. I began to investigate pre-war programming of avant-garde, or in the vocabulary of the day 'ultra-modern', music in Britain to assess the extent to which the music and ideas of Schoenberg and his associates had in fact been available at the time. It soon became apparent not only that Second Viennese School repertory and theories were known in Britain before 1939, but that they had been widely publicized, disseminated and discussed there in the years leading to World War II. This was due in large part to the high proportion of recently composed music that was made available to the public in BBC transmissions after British public broadcasting began in 1922.

Unlike secondary sources pertaining to British music history, sources relating to BBC history left no doubt that its new music policies and programmes were no less than extraordinary during the interwar years. This phenomenon was unanimously attributed to the presence on the BBC music staff from 1927 to 1936 of Edward Clark, a former pupil of Schoenberg. Clark was valued both for his remarkable ability to shape interesting and unusual music programmes and for his enthusiasm, knowledge and personal acquaintance with many British and continental composers of the day.

From there, I began to examine primary sources relating to interwar broadcasts of contemporary music at the BBC Written Archives Centre,

the depository for the countless papers that were at one time written and received by Corporation staff in the course of their daily work. These materials provide invaluable evidence concerning BBC decisions, goals and activities. Although many early papers relating to music broadcasting are no longer extant, I discovered an amazing amount of exciting and previously unexplored material. In fact, I spent many months wading through hundreds of files at the archives, looking at those directly relevant to the dissemination of Second Viennese School repertory, and at the same time uncovering and exploring less obvious, but essential, related materials.

I eventually realized that the nature of my study had to change. Contrary to post-war historical accounts, the impact of Second Viennese School repertory and ideas on British society before World War II was far from negligible. In fact, the impact of this music affected not only musical circles, but, to a surprising extent, the British public at large. The music and compositional aesthetics espoused by Schoenberg and his colleagues were known, heard and discussed in Britain throughout the interwar years, and their impact took on special significance from 1927, when performances of Second Viennese School works began to be broadcast by the BBC on a regular basis. In this way, this book emerged in place of my original research project. I found that the complex interrelationships of BBC staff structure, working processes and policy decisions, and their impact on programme output was a fascinating and worthwhile topic in its own right, and one which would fill a significant lacuna in British music history of the twentieth century.

Scope

It is necessary from the outset to define precisely what is referred to in this volume by 'the BBC'. Although the newly founded organization quickly developed regional branches from which music programmes were planned and transmitted, music by European contemporary composers was broadcast almost exclusively from the London studios during the interwar period, in the 1920s over the 2LO (5XX) and 5GB wavelengths and in the 1930s over the National and London Regional wavelengths. This study focuses on these London-based programmes and 'the BBC' refers to the organization and staff at the Head Office in London.

The period under discussion begins with the foundation of the British Broadcasting Company in November 1922 and concludes in spring 1936, when Edward Clark resigned from his position as music programme builder. Around the time of Clark's resignation, recommendations for changes to broadcasting policies and procedures were published in the

Ullswater Report in anticipation of the first renewal of the BBC's charter. In conjunction with Clark's resignation, this demarcates a discrete period in BBC music history, and serves here as a convenient ending point.

Finally, it is important to define specifically which composers and musicians fall within the scope of the Second Viennese circle for the purposes of this study. The composers were either *bona fide* associates of Schoenberg's circle at some time before he immigrated to the United States in 1933, or they were perceived to have belonged to this group by contemporary British writers and critics. Broadcasts involving works or performances by Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern and Alban Berg obviously come into the discussion, as do those by pupils of these composers, such as Egon Wellesz, Hanns Eisler, Paul Pisk, Roberto Gerhard, Viktor Ullmann, Norbert von Hannenheim, Adolph Weiss and Józef Koffler. Ernst Krenek considered himself to be an affiliate of the group in the early 1930s, and broadcasts of his music are noted. Although Josef Matthias Hauer was a rival of Schoenberg, his few BBC performances are discussed here, since they were associated idiomatically with the Schoenbergian school in BBC publicity and by the British press. In addition, certain performing artists associated with Schoenberg's circle were frequent guests of the BBC and also receive attention.

In its publicity and programme listings, the BBC did not necessarily use complete or accurate titles of musical works, and titles were invariably given in English to make them more accessible to the general public. Titles of works cited here in the text and tables are given in standardized, complete forms whenever possible, including opus number when appropriate; generic titles, such as symphony or sonata, are given in English, but in the case of distinctive titles, the original language is usually used. It is also worth noting here that idiosyncratic spellings in quoted material have been retained, but are not usually qualified by '*sic*'.

Reconstructed almost exclusively from the myriad of surviving written sources, the book takes the form of a documentary study, which closely explores and reflects contemporary evidence relating to BBC music activities. After initial chapters establish historical context in Part I, the discussion proceeds chronologically, with the span of years grouped into two periods. Part II explores the years between 1922 and spring 1930, the end of the final season of broadcasts influenced by Percy Pitt, the first BBC Music Director of significance. Part III covers the period between spring 1930 and spring 1936, when the Music Department was under the direction of Pitt's successor, Adrian Boult. Three appendices provide supplementary information. Appendix A is a list of Second Viennese School performances given in Britain, both in concert and as broadcasts, to the

end of May 1936. This list is undoubtedly not comprehensive, but represents the span of works that were presented, as well as the frequency of their performance. Appendix B gives programme information for the series of contemporary music concerts that were sponsored by the BBC between 1926 and 1936. Finally, Appendix C provides short, biographical summaries of significant people who come into the discussion, primarily including BBC staff members, contemporary musicians and British critics.

Sources

The fundamental source for this study is the vast body of documents and other materials held at the BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC) in Caversham, including many files of papers, microfilmed scripts, programme records, BBC periodicals, concert programmes and collections of contemporary press cuttings that survive at the WAC.⁵ A brief description of the archives' complex arrangement clarifies the way in which these source materials were chosen for consultation.

As Jacqueline Kavanagh, the WAC Archivist, has explained, the materials available for research in the archive today are still organized according to the filing system that the BBC adopted in 1927.

The BBC began as a commercial company: as it grew and expanded each new development is faithfully reflected in its papers . . . [After a few years, these] were increasing rapidly – too rapidly for the existing systems to cope [with] adequately – so a civil servant, Colonel Haldane, was invited to look at the Corporation's filing and make recommendations. The Haldane Report of 1927 . . . recommended the establishment of large centralised filing registries on Civil Service lines . . . The basic pattern imposed by these centralised systems survived into the 1970s, providing a firm but not inflexible framework, which adapted well to the many changes over that time.⁶

Within these central registries, the filing framework roughly matched the Corporation's organizational structure:

The primary division of the files . . . mirrors the organisation of the BBC itself – Radio, Television and the Overseas services (now World Service) in London, with separate parallel file sequences generated in each of the Regions. Within that primary arrangement, all the Registries grouped the papers they dealt with into large sections consisting of files in alphabetical order of title with some sub-groups.⁷

In the radio (R) category, large file groupings correspond to the original departments and subsections which created, used and collected them. Many of the files that I consulted originated in the Music Department,

presently filed under the heading 'Music General' (R27) and categorized according to the specific tasks and concerns that staff dealt with in the course of their work. These files hold papers on diverse subjects, such as music policy, music programme building, departmental committees, special BBC commissioning projects, the mounting of specific performances, external music organizations to which Music Department staff belonged, and music festivals attended by BBC representatives, to give only a few examples. Similar information concerning both general and specific areas of interest are also held in other categories of files, such as those devoted to various administrative committees, broadcasts originating in concert halls rather than in BBC studios, listener correspondence, papers about employee responsibilities and personnel hierarchies, staff files, etc.

Correspondence, contracts and other documents relating to the hiring of music specialists, such as performers, composers, scholars or critics, are held in the 'contributor files' (RCONT1). I consulted surviving contributor papers relating to Second Viennese School composers, their publishers, performers who specialized in this repertory and speakers who gave talks that included discussions of this type of music. Significantly, most of the RCONT1 files holding information relevant to people that Edward Clark knew personally are incomplete. When he left the Corporation in spring 1936, he apparently took with him letters written to him by his friends. Many of these, including letters to Clark from Schoenberg, Webern and Berg, subsequently found their way to the British Library and are held in the manuscript collection there as Add.ms.52256 and Add.ms.52257. In addition, a few carbon copies of letters written by Clark to various composers are now held in the Northwestern University Music Library manuscript collection, rather than at the WAC. Throughout the text, quotations from letters originally written in German appear only in English, in my translation unless otherwise indicated in the endnote citation. Full transcriptions of all quoted texts, in both English and the original language, appear in my dissertation (Doctor, *The BBC and the Ultra-Modern Problem*).

The task of tracing relevant information at the BBC archives is complicated by paper purges that have been carried out on several occasions since the BBC's foundation. As early as 1926, the first BBC Director-General, John Reith, decreed that 'as a principle he would sooner tear up ten letters and lose one of possible use than keep them all including the nine which can never be wanted'.⁸ Because employees were consequently ordered to keep their desks, drawers and files cleared of unnecessary papers, it is particularly difficult to uncover surviving evidence about BBC activities in the 1920s.

One final point about using BBC files needs to be mentioned: although papers relevant to this study were written over half a century ago, all files that I saw were 'vetted' by archive staff, conforming to standard WAC procedure, for papers that cannot be made public because they either contain material categorized as British 'official secrets' or they contain potentially libellous statements. Obviously, the nature of this study did not involve any material that would threaten British national security. However, it is important to record that several files contained papers that I was not permitted to see for the second reason.

In addition to archival files, the WAC holds three other classes of unpublished materials that were vital to this study. The 'Programmes as Broadcast' records, the BBC's programme log, provide an accurate account of what was transmitted each day on every wavelength. This extraordinary collection of lists, begun before the BBC was officially founded, shows exactly what music was broadcast, who performed, what music editions were used and gives exact timings for each broadcast item. Although the BBC has published daily broadcast listings in its weekly magazine, the *Radio Times*, since September 1923, these listings are prepared weeks in advance and often do not reflect what was actually transmitted. The 'Programmes as Broadcast' lists are the only accurate records of BBC broadcasts. An edition of these records exists,⁹ but this highly condensed version does not provide the level of detail required for this study.

The WAC's collection of scripts has also proven extremely useful, recording the substance of many broadcast talks. Unfortunately, the original scripts are no longer available for consultation; surviving scripts may only be read from microfilm. The microfilms do not contain scripts for all the talks that were broadcast during the period. The final version of each script read was supposedly collected at the end of the talk, but only a fair percentage are represented in the microfilm records.

Finally, volumes of John Reith's diaries covering the years under consideration were consulted in an attempt to fill in missing details about BBC music personnel and policy decisions. Published excerpts of the diaries exist,¹⁰ but brief references to obscure BBC employees, which have proven very useful to this study, are not included in these extracts. The version of the diaries available at the WAC for research purposes is not the original journal, but a condensation prepared by Reith himself; this condensed version was later vetted by archive staff, who deleted sentences that were deemed confidential according to the libel criterion.

Published primary sources fall into three categories: periodicals published by the BBC, articles and reports published in British newspapers and other periodicals, and books of the time that are relevant to BBC

history. The first category primarily consists of the *Radio Times*. This popular, weekly magazine provided essential information, both in its daily programme listings and in the accompanying articles, programme notes and published listeners' letters. The *Radio Times* was the early BBC's primary means of printed communication with listeners, providing publicity about future programmes, as well as details about programmes for the week in which it appeared. Because of its popular nature, the format was frequently changed and different approaches adopted to sustain readers' interest. It had a wide circulation – averaging over 1,300,000 sold per week by 1930, and over 2,600,000 per week by 1936 – and was aimed at readers from all parts of British society. Each issue included at least one article relating to art music.

Two other BBC publications were also consulted. *The Listener*, launched in 1929, was another weekly, founded to circulate edited versions of broadcast talks. Aimed at an intellectual audience, its columns included book reviews, critical discussions of concerts and broadcasts, and feature articles written by specialists on various topics. The BBC yearbooks, first published in 1928, vary in title as the *BBC Handbook*, *BBC Yearbook* and *BBC Annual*. In each volume, the Corporation summarized and publicized its annual programming achievements, technical innovations and newsworthy events or policy decisions. Each yearbook included a lengthy section about music programming, as well as statistics concerning licence distribution, lists of external committee members, and other factual information relating to the BBC and its operations.

The second category of published primary sources encompasses material that appeared in newspapers and music journals. Many newspaper articles that were consulted are held in the substantial press cuttings collections at the WAC. In addition, *The Musical Times* and the *Monthly Musical Record* were scrutinized for the years under consideration, both to gather information about performances and to gain an overview of the British musical climate between the wars. Many reviews of that time were published anonymously or attributed to their authors only by pseudonym or initials. Whenever possible, the identity of these authors has been traced and their names included in citations in square brackets.

Finally, several books reporting on BBC activities were published by BBC staff members during the period. The first wave of books appeared as early as 1924, when the success and popularity of the new broadcasting venture seemed assured; Reith, Cecil Lewis and Arthur Burrows, three of the four central figures in the early BBC hierarchy, published books that year.¹¹ Three books that appeared slightly after the period in question have also supplied missing details: the 1946 autobiography of Roger Eckersley,

the Director of Programmes for much of the period; an account of early BBC experiences written by P. P. Eckersley, the original Chief Engineer; and an alternative view of interwar BBC politics by *Radio Times* editor, Maurice Gorham.¹² In addition, BBC-sponsored books relating to music and music history, such as Percy Scholes's *Everybody's Guide to Broadcast Music*, have proved useful.

Secondary sources relating to this topic are listed in full in the bibliography. Four have provided crucial background information relating to the interwar BBC and its organization. The most important is Asa Briggs's history of the BBC, of which the first two volumes cover the interwar years. Paddy Scannell's social history of British broadcasting provides an account of the general social climate and reaction to the new broadcasting medium. Social insights into early British broadcasting are also explored in D. L. LeMahieu's fascinating study. Finally, Nicholas Kenyon's history of the BBC Symphony Orchestra is a wonderful compilation of material relating to this important ensemble since its formation in 1930.¹³

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03586-6 - The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922-1936: Shaping a Nation's Tastes

Jennifer Doctor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

PART I

The emergence of BBC music programmes