

Forgotten Pasts and Imagined Futures: The First International Webern Festival and the 1962 Seattle World's Fair

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Abstract

In an April 1962 article previewing the First International Webern Festival, Hans Moldenhauer promised that Anton Webern's music would one day be known as 'the music of the space age'. Moldenhauer chose his words carefully. The Webern Festival was set to take place in Seattle at the same time as the World's Fair (an event also known as the 'Century 21 Exposition' and 'America's Space Age World's Fair') and its opening night concert would be held on the grounds of the World's Fair. Yet the two 'W.F.s' made for an awkward pairing. Far from space-age music, the lush textures and sweeping gestures of the Webern's Festival's posthumous premieres revealed a young Webern rooted in nineteenth-century Romanticism. Critics and scholars' responses to these premieres reveal much about the contested place of Webern's music – and modernist music more generally – within mid-century mainstream culture.

It was spring 1962, and Thomas Pynchon was mad. The American novelist was living in Seattle and working as a technical writer at Boeing. In a letter to friend and fellow writer Kirkpatrick Sale, he bemoaned a recent addition to his city:

I am boycotting the S.W.F. [Seattle World's Fair]. It is an excuse for merchants in town to make money, is all it is. Prices have gone up even in greasy spoons, little old ladies on relief have been evicted to make way for tourists, traffic snarls when they occur are so vast as to be almost historical events. Those who own businesses are profiting, but the Consumer, that great, mindless majority of whom I am am [*sic*] one, is getting screwed (as we say), blewed [*sic*] and tattooed.

Pynchon objected to the inflation and congestion the World's Fair brought, but he was even more frustrated by how the fair was remaking the Seattle cityscape:

This city is a nightmare. If there were no people in it it would be beautiful . . . urban-inanimate Seattle, that's all right – or will be until the city planners get rid of the best parts – replace the dirty bricks and gargoyles and Victorian excesses of old Seattle with either a) glass and aluminum parallelipeds or b) quaint, arty restorations

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of Seattle As It Used To Be back in the gilded age. Skid Road will go, the winos will be made to shave and join AA, they'll turn Pioneer Square into a parking lot. Aaahhhrrrggghhh.¹

His misanthropic tendencies notwithstanding, Pynchon's analysis of the World's Fair was spot-on. He identified two motivations behind the fair's design: economic incentives and a spirit of modernization. As historian John Findlay has noted, 'the cold war encouraged [the World's Fair] to emphasize those economic and technological forces responsible for the prosperous and futuristic character of Seattle and other western metropolitan areas after World War II'.² What had originally been billed as a 'Festival of the West' celebrating regional culture was reconceived following the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957. By the time it opened in April 1962, it was known not only as 'the Seattle World's Fair', but also as 'America's Space Age World's Fair' and 'the Century 21 Exposition' (Figure 1).

The fair's dual motivations resulted in a heady mélange of technological utopianism and middlebrow commercialism. A sleek new monorail, built by the same company that had recently constructed one at Disneyland, shuttled visitors between downtown Seattle and the sprawling fairgrounds. Companies such as Boeing and IBM sponsored pavilions, none of which was more popular than the 'World of Tomorrow' pavilion and its 'Bubbleator' ride, the soundtrack of which spawned Attilio Mineo's souvenir record *Man in Space with Sounds*, now a cult classic. The NASA pavilion received astronaut John Glenn, fresh off his inaugural orbit of the Earth just a few months earlier. Advertising for the fair played up this space exploration angle, with one ad depicting a pair of aliens marvelling at the fair from a UFO far above.³ Space travel was also the inspiration behind the fair's most famous and enduring structure: the Space Needle. The building was featured on the cover of *Life* magazine prior to the opening of the fair, and its parabolic lines influenced the architecture featured in *The Jetsons*, which premiered later the same year.⁴ The Space Needle also figured prominently in a movie filmed on the fairgrounds, an Elvis Presley vehicle entitled *It Happened at the World's Fair*.⁵ Findlay describes this blend of broadly appealing entertainment and futuristic aesthetics as a mix between 'the simple pleasures of the carnival, the promotional messages of corporations and governments, and the ideas of artists, designers, and scientists'.⁶ Journalist Alistair Cooke summed up the same phenomenon both more

1 Letter, Thomas Pynchon to Kirkpatrick Sale, 28 May 1962. Thomas Pynchon Collection, box 2, folder 1, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

2 John Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture after 1940* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 5.

3 'Seattle World's Fair TV Commercial (1962) by Soundac Productions', *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_i91LDTeQtk.

4 Knute Berger, *Space Needle: The Spirit of Seattle* (Seattle, WA: Documentary Media, 2012).

5 *It Happened at the World's Fair* and *Man in Space with Sounds* were only two of the fair's many musical products. While I focus here on just one of those products – the First International Webern Festival – the music of the Seattle World's Fair could easily be the subject of a more wide-ranging study, in the style of Annegret Fauser's work on the 1889 World's Fair in Paris. See Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005).

6 Findlay, *Magic Lands*, 239.



Figure 1 (Colour online) Poster for the Seattle World's Fair. Source: Museum of History and Industry, Seattle, WA.

succinctly and less generously in a review of the fair, dismissing it as 'a trade fair overlaid with Coney Island'.⁷

About a month after the fair's opening, a new offering was added to its line-up: the First International Webern Festival (Figure 2). The festival was the work of Hans and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, musicians, music teachers, and music manuscript collectors who lived a few hours east of Seattle in Spokane, Washington. After a chance discovery led the

⁷ Alistair Cooke, 'Space-age Fair with a Coney Island Touch', *Manchester Guardian*, 23 April 1962.

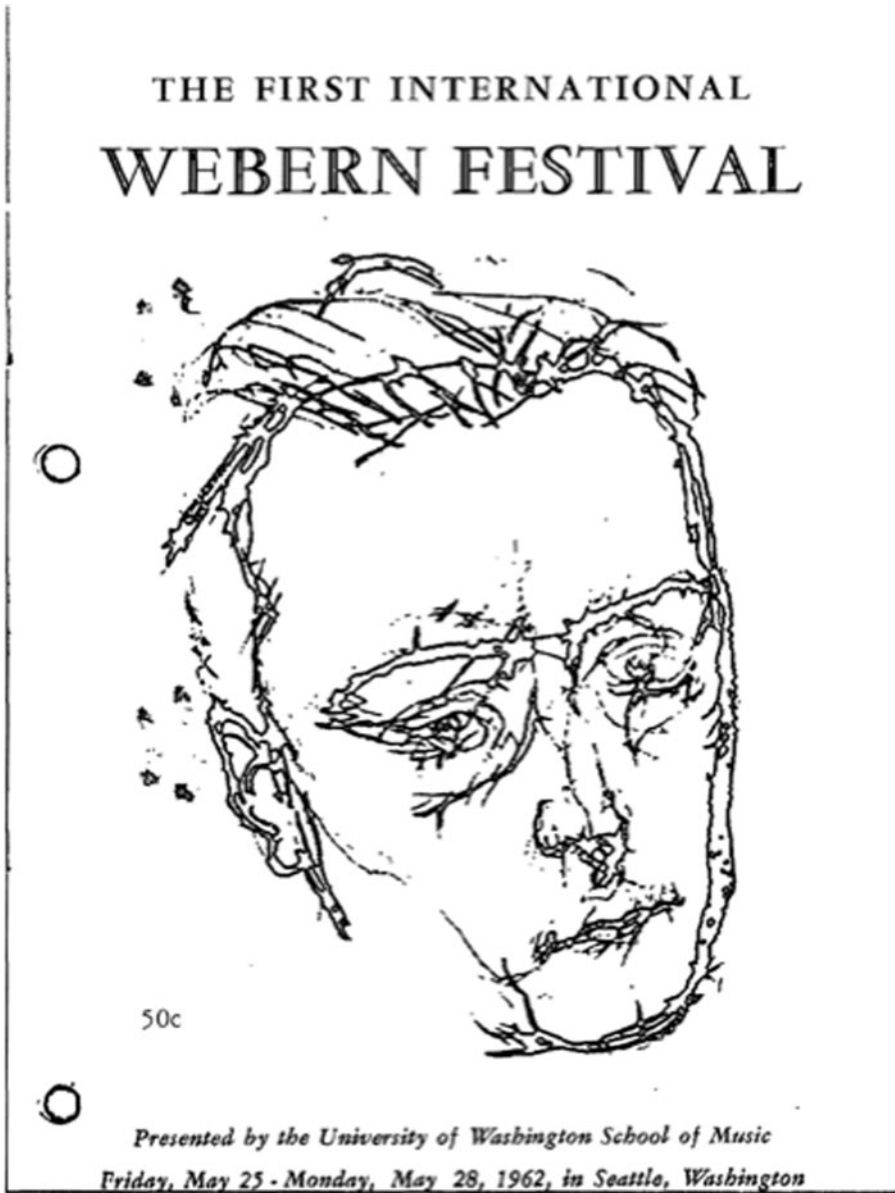


Figure 2 Cover of programme booklet for the First International Webern Festival, featuring a sketch of Webern by Oskar Kokoschka. Source: Moldenhauer Archives at Harvard University.

Moldenhauers to uncover the previously unknown circumstances of Webern's death at the hands of an American soldier in 1945, they published *The Death of Anton Webern: A Drama in Documents* in 1961. The publication led to contact with Amalie Webern Waller, the composer's eldest daughter, which in turn led the Moldenhauers to purchase a large collection of Webern's documents from Waller in summer 1961. This collection included compositional sketches, letters, photographs, postcards, and – most significantly – several

dozen never-performed compositions dating from Webern's young adulthood. These findings were announced in a pair of *New York Times* articles in September 1961, which noted that the Moldenhauers planned to unveil the new works to the public at the First International Webern Festival the following year.⁸

Though most of the Webern Festival would be held on the campus of the University of Washington, its opening night concert was set to take place at the brand-new Seattle Opera House, on the grounds of the World's Fair. The concert would feature the world premiere of Webern's 1904 orchestral work *Im Sommerwind* (*In the Summer Wind*), performed by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra. As the performance neared, Hans Moldenhauer penned a preview of the Webern Festival for the magazine *Music of the West*:

Coinciding with the Seattle World's Fair, and constituting one of its most significant cultural contributions, the First International Webern Festival will evidence a vital phase of musical esthetics in our time, as formulated in its syntax by one of the now 'classic' masters of the century. It also will open vistas of new dimensions in our art which may well become known as the music of the space age.⁹

The language employed by Moldenhauer, especially the phrase 'music of the space age', aligned the Webern Festival with the future-oriented outlook of the World's Fair; this pairing of a world's fair with modernist music was not unique, as seen in Varèse and Xenakis's contributions to the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels and Stockhausen's involvement with the 1970 World Exposition in Osaka.¹⁰ Moldenhauer's choice of words also mirrored language used by musicians and academics at the time, who frequently depicted Webern as the most modern of modernists. The archetypical example of this reception is Pierre Boulez's 1951 essay 'Schoenberg is Dead', in which Boulez hailed Webern as an ahead-of-his-time visionary while accusing Schoenberg of upholding 'a very unhappy heritage owed to scarcely defensible scleroses of a certain bastard language adopted by romanticism'.¹¹ Critics, meanwhile, often discussed Webern's symmetrically structured music as if it were an instance of the space-age architecture Thomas Pynchon so loathed. Virgil Thomson, for example, once described Webern's Symphony, op. 21 as 'spun-steel' and 'pure star-dust'.¹²

Yet the music performed at the First International Webern Festival was anything but 'the music of the space age'. *Im Sommerwind* is a rambling Romantic tone poem. Its premiere was followed the next night by the premieres of several early chamber music works, which likewise

8 Eric Salzman, 'Unheard Scores of Webern Found: U.S. Musicologist Acquired Them from Composer's Family in Austria', *New York Times*, 4 September 1961; Hans Moldenhauer, 'Rich Webern Legacy Contains Unknown Compositions', *New York Times*, 17 September 1961.

9 Hans Moldenhauer, 'First International Webern Festival to be Held in Seattle', *Music of the West* 17/8 (1962), 4.

10 For more on Varèse and Xenakis, see Helga de La Motte-Haber, 'Iannis Xenakis – Musikalische Architektur und architektonische Musik', *Musica: Zweimonatsschrift* 50/3 (1996); Marc Treib, *Space Calculated in Seconds: The Philips Pavilion, Le Corbusier, Edgar Varèse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). For more on Stockhausen, see Peter Moorman, 'Raum-Musik als Kontaktzone: Stockhausens Hymnen bei der Weltausstellung in Osaka 1970', *Paragrana: Internationale Zeitschrift für Historische Anthropologie* 19/2 (2010).

11 Pierre Boulez, 'Schoenberg is Dead', in *Notes of an Apprenticeship* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1968), 273.

12 Virgil Thomson, 'Star-Dust and Spun-Steel', *New York Herald Tribune*, 27 January 1950.

made evident Webern's roots in nineteenth-century musical practice. Over the course of this article, I document how those in attendance reacted to the first performances of Webern's earliest compositions at these two concerts. This moment in the reception history of Webern's music was unusual for two reasons. First, it represented the revelation of about a decade's worth of a major composer's development all at once. Second, it juxtaposed Webern's music with the World's Fair, a pairing that evinced both congruences and contrasts. The critics, musicians, and musicologists who attended the festival responded in a variety of ways. Some were quick to revise their views of Webern's music, while others doubled down on well-worn tropes. Some, such as Moldenhauer, looked to link the Webern Festival to the World's Fair, while others saw the two events as diametrically opposed. The tensions between these various responses reveal much about the trajectory of Webern's music – and of modernist music more generally – during the second half of the twentieth century.

Concert 1: the past in the future

On 25 May 1962, a Friday evening, Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra were the World's Fair's star attraction. Their performance at the Seattle Opera House began with an orchestral version of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor before continuing with Beethoven's Symphony no. 7, which garnered a standing ovation. After intermission came the premiere of Webern's *Im Sommerwind* along with Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*, and, finally, a surprise encore, the finale of Stravinsky's *Firebird*.¹³ Ormandy had contacted the Moldenhauers after learning of the work's existence, reporting that he was 'most anxious' to lead its premiere.¹⁴ Before beginning the performance, he took a moment to acknowledge the presence of Amalie Webern Waller, though he had initially been hesitant to do so. Ormandy felt that Webern's music should 'speak for itself', but in the end Waller did not speak, choosing instead to simply stand and accept the audience's applause on behalf of her father.¹⁵ According to one account, so many audience members stood up to get a better look at Waller that it became impossible to pick her out among the crowd.¹⁶

A concertgoer who had arrived at the Opera House after a ride on the monorail or dinner atop the Space Needle might well have expected to hear in Webern's work the future of classical music – after all, Moldenhauer had promised 'the music of the space age'. Instead, the audience was treated not to a glimpse of a century yet to come, but to an evocation of one long since passed. *Im Sommerwind*, subtitled 'Idyll for Large Orchestra', takes its name from a poem published in 1901 by the German author and politician Bruno Wille. Though Wille's poem was not reproduced in the programme at *Im Sommerwind*'s premiere,

13 Herbert Whittaker, 'Showbusiness: Seattle World's Fair Is Friendly, Modest Exhibition', *Globe and Mail*, 28 May 1962.

14 Letter, Eugene Ormandy to Hans Moldenhauer, 7 September 1961. The Moldenhauer Archives at Harvard University, box 2, item 107.

15 Letter, Eugene Ormandy to Hans Moldenhauer, 30 April 1962. The Moldenhauer Archives at Harvard University, box 2, item 107.

16 Whittaker, 'Showbusiness'.

it is worth pausing to consider the words that inspired Webern's music. Take, for instance, the opening stanza:

Es wogt die laue Sommerluft.	The tepid summer breeze bestirs
Wachholderbüsche, Brombeerranken.	Juniper copses; trailing brambles
Und Adlerfarren nicken, wanken.	And fernbrakes gently nod and wave.
Die struppigen Kiefernhäupter schwanken;	The ragged pine-tops move in rhythm;
Rehbraune Äste knarren;	Doe-brown branches chatter;
Von ihren zarten, schlanken,	Around their fragile, slender
Lichtgrünen Schossen stäubt	Light-green sprigs is strewn
Der harzige Duft;	The resinous scent;
Und die weiche	Luft And the aimless breeze
Wallt hin wie betäubt.	Moves lightly along. ¹⁷

Wille's poetry presents nature as 'a sacred, religious mystery'.¹⁸ Yet at the World's Fair, science and technology – not nature – were the objects of worship. The fair's organizers presented science as 'a source of inspiration, comfort, and universal understanding', so much so that it began to assume 'some of the functions once reserved for religion'.¹⁹ Many of the fair's exhibits demonstrated a 'faith in American science and technology as sources of progress and harmony', and a 'confidence in an almost unlimited ability to master the environments of earth and outer space'.²⁰ There were even 'space-gothic' arches situated at the centre of the fairgrounds, designed to resemble a medieval cathedral (these arches can be seen in the lower left corner of [Figure 1](#)). A Romantic ode to the summer wind had no place at a fair like this.

Nor, really, did Webern's *Im Sommerwind*, which was every bit the match for Wille's poetry. The work opens with a characteristically Romantic gesture, a slowly unfurling D major triad that morphs into a lush and sweeping melody. 'The tonic chord of D major', as Julian Johnson describes, 'is not given immediately but gradually built up over seven slow bars from the double-bass fundamental to the first violins' A, five and a half octaves higher', calling to mind the Prelude to *Das Rheingold* and serving as a reminder that Webern was a devoted Wagnerian in his youth.²¹ Indeed, critics present at the premiere focused their attention on how much *Im Sommerwind* resembled the music of an array of nineteenth-century composers, and how little it resembled Webern's later music. Herbert Whittaker of the *Globe and Mail* asserted that the work was 'more influenced by Wagner, Strauss and Debussy than by Schoenberg'.²² Francean Campbell, of the Vancouver-based newspaper *The Province*, described *Im Sommerwind* as 'all sweetness and light, charm and

17 Translation by Julian Johnson. Julian Johnson, *Webern and the Transformation of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 237.

18 Johnson, *Webern and the Transformation of Nature*, 71.

19 Findlay, *Magic Lands*, 234.

20 Findlay, *Magic Lands*, 215.

21 Johnson, *Webern and the Transformation of Nature*, 65.

22 Whittaker, 'Showbusiness'.

pastoral sensuality', noting that it would 'probably give rise to considerable misunderstanding' for those familiar with the rest of Webern's output.²³ For the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Alfred Frankenstein, the work was 'full of propulsive fire and grand orchestral devices in the manner of Richard Strauss', while also recalling Mahler in its 'folk-like tunefulness and its contrasts of thick orchestration with soloistic writing'. Frankenstein noted that 'Webern, the inventor of fiendishly intricate musical structures, [had] long been the darling of academic music departments everywhere', but that now 'Webern the tuneful, brightly colored romanticist was displayed to the world for the first time.'²⁴ Only the *New York Times's* Harold Schonberg was more equivocal, deeming *Im Sommerwind* 'derivative' and 'what one might expect from a very talented student in 1904'. Schonberg also made the crucial observation that the composer who would go on to write 'tiny, disciplined, superbly organized pieces' had yet to develop 'his later condensed style'.²⁵ Lasting twelve to fifteen minutes, *Im Sommerwind* is not Webern's longest composition, but it certainly *feels* longer than anything else he ever wrote, thanks to its relaxed pacing, extended pedal points, and slow harmonic rhythm. As Derrick Puffett describes in one of the most substantial scholarly treatments of *Im Sommerwind* to date, the work represents 'an extreme from which everything else [in Webern's oeuvre] will subsequently contract'.²⁶ Possessing neither brevity nor even a sense of concision, it lacks the qualities that have come to define Webern's music in the minds of many listeners.

Whatever their opinion of the work, then, most critics agreed that *Im Sommerwind* had little to do with Webern's later compositions. But at least one observer viewed the work differently. James Beale, a professor of music theory and composition at the University of Washington, argued in the Webern Festival programme notes that *Im Sommerwind* evinced 'careful study of Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*, Op. 5' – a dubious claim given that *Im Sommerwind* was completed four months prior to the premiere of *Pelleas* and before Webern had ever met Schoenberg.²⁷ Though he was wrong on the facts, Beale's rhetoric is noteworthy. In contrast to the critics present at the premiere, Beale emphasized a continuity between *Im Sommerwind* and Webern's later works by suggesting that it had as much to do with Schoenberg as it did with Wagner, Mahler, or Strauss. This theme would grow more prominent at the Webern Festival's second concert the following night, to which I now turn my attention.

23 Francean Campbell, 'Philadelphia Gives Fair Symphony at its Best', *The Province*, 26 May 1962.

24 Alfred Frankenstein, 'A Webern Work of Real Stature', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 May 1962.

25 Harold C. Schonberg, 'Webern Festival Begins in Seattle: 1904 Work Given Premiere by Philadelphia Orchestra', *New York Times*, 27 May 1962.

26 Derrick Puffett, 'Gone with the Summer Wind, or, What Webern Lost: Nine Variations on a Ground', in *Webern Studies*, ed. Kathryn Bailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43.

27 James Beale, programme notes for the First International Webern Festival. The Moldenhauer Archives at Harvard University, item 1862. Beale's programme notes were later reprinted as James Beale, 'Webern's Musical Estate', in *Anton von Webern: Perspectives*, ed. Demar Irvine (Seattle, WA, and London: University of Washington Press, 1966).

Concert 2: the future in the past

A few months after the conclusion of the Webern Festival, Hans Moldenhauer received a letter from the Austrian-American composer Ernst Krenek, who had been in attendance:

If the combination of the two W.F.s (Webern Festival and World's Fair) may have raised some eyebrows, the initiators of the Festival must be praised for having accomplished remarkable feats of organization and coordination . . . If we raised our eyebrows, it was only to admire Mt. Rainier, which we were lucky enough to contemplate for fifteen majestic minutes.²⁸

Krenek referred to Rainier Vista, a promenade at the University of Washington that frames the Pacific Northwest's highest peak – though the top of the mountain is frequently obscured by clouds. Following the opening night performance of *Im Sommerwind* on the grounds of the World's Fair, the Webern Festival moved to the university's campus for three days of concerts, lectures, and exhibitions. The campus was another kind of fairground, as much of it had been constructed for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, a world's fair held in 1909. In contrast to the international and interplanetary themes of the 1962 fair, the focus of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition was regional. It celebrated the growth of Seattle and the surrounding areas in the wake of the Klondike Gold Rush a decade earlier, with an emphasis on natural resources and natural beauty. Rainier Vista (Figure 3) cut through the centre of the fairgrounds, designed to draw eyes to the mountain, as Krenek's eyes would be drawn a half-century later.

In the same article in which he promised that Webern's music would be known as 'the music of the space age', Moldenhauer argued that the University of Washington's 'majestic mountain scenery . . . would have inspired Webern himself in his intense love for Alpine [*sic*] heights'.²⁹ With these seemingly contradictory descriptions, Moldenhauer acknowledged a tension within Webern's body of work. On the one hand was cutting-edge compositional practice – 'the music of the space age'; on the other was a traditional conception of nature as a source of artistic inspiration. This tension was highlighted at the Webern Festival's opening night, as *Im Sommerwind* frustrated pre-existing notions of Webern's music and clashed with the futurism of the World's Fair. A similar theme would emerge at the festival's second concert, as more newly discovered works documented Webern's evolution from an aspiring composer growing up in the Austrian countryside to a disciple of Schoenberg studying in Vienna. As had been the case the night before, critics and scholars made comparisons between these works and the works of various nineteenth- and early twentieth-century composers. To a much greater degree than with *Im Sommerwind*, however, they also searched the qualities that distinguished Webern's later works.

28 Letter, Ernst Krenek to Hans Moldenhauer, 7 August 1962. The Moldenhauer Archives at Harvard University, box 2, item 91.

29 Moldenhauer, 'First International Webern Festival to be Held in Seattle'. It is little surprise that Moldenhauer mentioned the campus's mountain views, since he was a mountaineer himself and had previously ascended Mt Rainier. As Johnson points out, 'it is Hans Moldenhauer, Webern's principal biographer, who must take the credit for emphasizing this side to Webern's life'. See Johnson, *Webern and the Transformation of Nature*, 5.



Figure 3 Rainier Vista at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, 1909. Source: Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

The first half of the concert featured the world premieres of four previously unknown groups of compositions: Three Poems for Voice and Piano (1899–1903), Three Songs after Poems by Ferdinand Avenarius (1903–4), the String Quartet (1905), and Five Songs after Poems by Richard Dehmel (1906–8).³⁰ The programme began with ‘Vorfrühling’ (‘Early spring’), Webern’s earliest extant song. Composed in 1899, when Webern was fifteen, ‘Vorfrühling’ predates *Im Sommerwind* by about five years. It opens with a perfect fifth in the left hand of the piano, utilizing a device common to much eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pastoral music in which ‘the “root” of the tonal system itself . . . acts as a symbol for a primal stage of nature’.³¹ The same fifth returns towards the end of the song, which closes with a repetition of the opening four bars. The ascending vocal line on the words ‘*Leise tritt auf*’ (‘Tread lightly’) is marked *so zart als möglich* (‘as gently as possible’), as the soprano ascends to a high Eb and the fifth fades away below. Harold Schonberg reported that ‘Vorfrühling’ and the other early songs heard on the programme were ‘in the idiom of

30 Only the Three Poems for Voice and Piano and the Five Songs after Poems by Richard Dehmel were grouped together by Webern. The Three Songs after Poems by Ferdinand Avenarius represent a later, editorial grouping, as is also the case with other early Webern songs not performed on this programme. For a detailed overview of the chronology and organization of Webern’s early songs, see Matthew R. Shaftel, ed., *The Anton Webern Collection: Early Vocal Music, 1809–1909* (New York: Carl Fischer, 2004), vi–vii.

31 Johnson, *Webern and the Transformation of Nature*, 52.

Strauss, Wolf and even Brahms', and that 'some of them [were] very beautiful'.³² Alfred Frankenstein offered a similar evaluation, contending that the works were 'in a tonal tuneful, Strauss-Mahler kind of style . . . beautiful and eminently worthy of performance'.³³ In the programme notes, Beale was quick to note that while many of Webern's earliest songs seemed simple, none were strophic, nor did any rely on the 'A-B-A formula of the three-part song'. He argued that 'many of the songs explore the advanced tendencies of the time', and that 'even those which restrict themselves to more ordinary chords often use them in novel ways'.³⁴ Beale's priority was to highlight the forward-looking aspects of Webern's style, even in works which, like 'Vorfrühling', did not invite such an interpretation. This approach would become a trope in the reception of Webern's earliest works; I will discuss further examples of it shortly.

After more songs came the single-movement String Quartet (1905). In a sense, the quartet is nature music in the mould of *Im Sommerwind* and 'Vorfrühling'. Webern's inspiration for the work was a triptych of alpine landscapes by the Italian painter Giovanni Segantini, which Webern had viewed in Munich on his way home from the 1902 Bayreuth Festival.³⁵ The ending of the work, furthermore, features a 'prolongation of an inflected but otherwise static tonic chord' that bears some resemblance to the tonic pedals heard throughout *Im Sommerwind*.³⁶ Yet the quartet is also the product of Webern's move to Vienna and first year of study with Arnold Schoenberg, something Beale made sure to point out. Beale likened the quartet to Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, noting that both works employed a technique he called 'perpetual development', as well as exhibiting a 'complex contrapuntal (though always harmonically based) texture'. Despite the similarities between the quartet and *Verklärte Nacht*, Beale reassured the audience that Webern's work was not entirely derivative of Schoenberg's. 'There are strikingly original moments in the *Quartet*', he asserted, and 'it is here that we find, in the occasional *pizzicato* notes, our first hint of the *sotto voce* remarks to become typical of Webern'.³⁷ While Beale emphasized Webern's originality, Schoenberg took a different lesson from the String Quartet's premiere. In his view, the work was proof that Webern 'did not turn to serial technique because he had no other means of expression', that he 'did have a melodic gift', and that he 'could write traditional music with the best of them'. 'When [Webern] turned to the crepuscular world of the Five Movements for String Quartet', Schoenberg argued, 'it was not because he had to, not because he lacked gifts in any other direction'.³⁸ Crucially, Schoenberg's comments suggested that atonal and twelve-tone music did not represent the only path Webern's career might have followed.³⁹ Most other responses to the Webern

32 Schonberg, 'Music: Webern Festival in Seattle'.

33 Frankenstein, 'Webern Festival on the Sidelines of a Fair'.

34 Beale, programme notes.

35 For more on the connections between the String Quartet and Segantini's paintings, see Eric Frederick Jensen, 'Webern and Giovanni Segantini's *Trittico della natura*', *The Musical Times* 130/1751 (January, 1989).

36 Johnson, *Webern and the Transformation of Nature*, 78.

37 Beale, programme notes.

38 Schonberg, 'Music: Webern Festival in Seattle'.

39 Imagining what Webern's music might have been like had he studied with Hans Pfitzner (with whom a young Webern once had an interview) instead of Schoenberg is the jumping-off point of the article by Puffett cited in note 26.

Festival performances implied exactly the opposite, as will be evident in my final example from the festival's second concert.

The first half of the concert concluded with the premiere of Webern's Five Songs after Poems by Richard Dehmel. Composed between 1906 and 1908, these songs were the latest of Webern's pre-op. 1 works performed at the festival; three of the five songs were composed in 1908, the same year in which Webern completed his formal study with Schoenberg and composed the Passacaglia, op. 1 and *Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen*, op. 2.⁴⁰ Beale argued that these songs demonstrated Webern's 'complete mastery of the technique of the Viennese School', as evidenced by the presence of 'all the advanced chords of the period – augmented chords, the French sixth sound, freely inverted ninth chords, and even chords built on the whole-tone scale'.⁴¹ Leonard Stein, a former Schoenberg associate who performed the songs alongside soprano Grace-Lynne Martin, delivered a lecture earlier the same day in which he emphasized their role as 'a link in the evolution of Webern's style'. Though Stein argued that the 'first most characteristic formulation' of Webern's mature style was found in the Stefan George settings published as opp. 3 and 4, he detected hints of that style in the Dehmel songs.⁴² Stein focused his attention on 'Helle Nacht' ('Bright Night'), the final song of the set and the only one to lack a conventional tonal ending:

'Helle Nacht' ends on an unresolved chord, which comes from the ending chord of the opening phrase: an augmented triad superimposed on a tritone. Webern retains the key signature of D minor for this song, and to a certain extent we might assume that the final chord represents the leading tone of that key, C sharp. But, unlike all the other songs, the lack of consequences of traditional harmony and of triadic emphasis throughout this song abnegates once and for all any definite affinity or necessity for a tonal center. Thus we are led, in this last Dehmel song, to the threshold of the 'true' Webern style, and to his mature manner of expression and use of musical means.⁴³

Stein's argument centred on the song's final moments, in which the words 'o hin, o Traum' ('Be gone, oh dream') are sung to consecutive melodic tritones. An extended piano postlude follows, coming to rest on the sonority described by Stein. For Stein, Webern's 'true' musical style and 'mature manner of expression' could mean only one thing: atonal music. 'Helle Nacht', an ostensibly tonal song that appears to drift away from tonality in its closing bars, was the perfect candidate to represent Webern's departure from tradition and entrance into a fully modern musical world.

40 Johnson cites several connections between the Passacaglia and several of the Dehmel settings. See Johnson, *Webern and the Transformation of Nature*, 87–95.

41 Beale, programme notes.

42 Leonard Stein, 'Webern's Dehmel Lieder of 1906–8', in *Anton von Webern: Perspectives*, ed. Demar Irvine (Seattle, WA, and London: University of Washington Press, 1966), 55, 57. The article published in *Anton von Webern: Perspectives* is an edited version of the lecture Stein delivered at the festival.

43 Stein, 'Webern's Dehmel Lieder of 1906–8', 61.

Temptations, dangers, and opportunities

I wonder, then, what it must have been like that night in Seattle when the audience returned from intermission to hear Webern's *Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen* (*In Swift Light Vessels Gliding*), op. 2. This work, written in 1908, the same year as 'Helle Nacht', is undeniably 'true' Webern – it has an opus number and everything. Yet its ending is almost the opposite of the ending of 'Helle Nacht'. Instead of dissolving into proto-atonality, *Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen* lurches its way to a major triad – the only one of its kind in the entire work. Did this musical consonance cause any cognitive dissonance for attendees of the Webern Festival? The programme had been organized to suggest a break between Webern's newly premiered early works and his 'mature' published works. But the first work to be performed out of the latter group went out of its way to reaffirm a relic of the former group, tonality. 'Helle Nacht' could not have '[abnegated] once and for all any definite affinity or necessity for a tonal center', as Stein had claimed, for here was tonality alive and well, if only for a moment.

The final chord of *Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen* is a small vexation, but it points to a larger problem. In a 1965 article on Webern's early works, Edward Cone argued that 'it is impossible to listen with an unbiased ear to the juvenilia or the student works of a well-known composer', since doing so exposes the listener to 'one of two temptations':

On the one hand, since we cannot help remembering the superior works yet to come, it is hard not to look condescendingly upon compositions that, except in the case of a young Mozart, are bound to be imperfect copies; and it is great sport to point both to their imperfections and to their obvious models. On the other hand, it is even more amusing to find intimations of a style yet to be formed – occasional phrases or devices that seem to foreshadow the works of the composer's maturity. To be sure, both games, legitimately played, can lead to valuable insights. The one is a temptation only because it is so easy; it is usually safe. The other is challenging and potentially more rewarding – but accordingly more dangerous.⁴⁴

The Webern Festival saw several examples of Cone's first temptation, but its instances of the second, more 'dangerous' temptation are more revealing. Whether in the form of Stein's analysis of 'Helle Nacht' or Beale's insistence that the String Quartet (1905) was not too derivative of Schoenberg, the critics and scholars in attendance took every opportunity to suggest that Webern's early works anticipated his later works not only in specific compositional techniques, but also in their general inventiveness. Rather than considering whether Webern's late-Romantic heritage should prompt a re-evaluation of his modernist works, they portrayed it as a passing phase, a skin Webern had to shed in order to reach his full potential. This perspective has remained influential. 'Helle Nacht' and the rest of the Five Songs after Poems by Richard Dehmel have been discussed almost exclusively in terms of their role in Webern's journey to atonality since Stein emphasized that angle. There are several dissertations and

44 Edward T. Cone, 'Webern's Apprenticeship', *The Musical Quarterly* 53/1 (1967), 39. Puffett points out a third, arguably even more dangerous possibility: 'finding intimations of a style *not* later realised'. See Puffett, 'Gone with the Summer Wind', 39.

articles, for example, with titles such as ‘Toward atonality: pitch structure in Webern’s *Dehmel* songs’ and ‘Signposts on Webern’s path to atonality: The *Dehmel Lieder* (1906–08)’.⁴⁵ Many scholars have suggested, along similar lines, that the String Quartet (1905) contains the first truly atonal music to come out of the Second Viennese School, and *Im Sommerwind* has been repeatedly probed for potential connections to Webern’s later orchestral works.⁴⁶ One particularly implausible instance of the latter is Malcolm Hayes’s claim that *Im Sommerwind*’s (admittedly curious) lack of trombones and tuba is evidence of Webern’s efforts to chart a course ‘beyond the glutted sumptuousness that was the Achilles’ heel of the late-Romantic orchestral style’ – despite the fact that the work calls for an orchestra that is massive and colourful in every other way.⁴⁷

There is nothing necessarily wrong with viewing Webern’s earliest works in this way, as steppingstones to the later works for which he is better known. Chronology insists that they were, and the stylistic evolution from one work to the next is evident enough. Yet taking this approach to the exclusion of others can lead to missed opportunities. The 1962 Webern Festival, for instance, featured essentially zero discussion of the texts of the various vocal works performed; texts and translations were not even provided in the programme. It strikes me as odd, furthermore, that so few of the commentators at the festival took the time to answer the one question that is almost always asked following a world premiere: was the music any good? One exception to this trend was the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s Alfred Frankenstein. In addition to describing various early works as ‘beautiful’ or ‘tuneful’, Frankenstein suggested that some of them were good enough to impact Webern’s broader standing as a composer. ‘If [*Im Sommerwind*] were by Sibelius’, he argued, ‘it would be hailed as a lost masterpiece. Since it is by Webern it is something less than a masterpiece, but I suspect we’ll be hearing a lot of it before too long.’⁴⁸ Frankenstein felt that the works premiered at the Webern Festival were more than ‘mere juvenilia’. Had ‘Webern’s circumstances been more fortunate’, he contended, ‘these early works would have been brought out when they were new and the world would have had a chance to enjoy them for the past half century.’⁴⁹

45 John F. Doerksen, ‘Toward Atonality: Pitch Structure in Webern’s *Dehmel Songs*’ (M.M. diss., University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1990); Robert W. Wason, ‘Signposts on Webern’s Path to Atonality: The *Dehmel Lieder* (1906–08)’, in *Music Theory in Concept and Practice* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997). See also Matthew Alan Kull, ‘Structure and Stylistic Evolution in Anton Webern’s *Dehmel Lieder* (1906–1908)’ (PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2003).

46 For an overview of this reception of the String Quartet (1905), see Sebastian Wedler, ‘Thus Spoke the Early Modernist: *Zarathustra* and Rotational Form in Webern’s String Quartet (1905)’, *Twentieth-Century Music* 12/2 (2015), 226–7.

47 Malcolm Hayes, *Anton von Webern* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 46. Puffett criticizes a 1967 essay by Paul Pisk for its similarly hyperbolic discussion of *Im Sommerwind*. See Puffett, ‘Gone with the Summer Wind’, 40. Timothy Judd suggests that Webern’s omission of trombones and tuba may have been influenced by similar scoring in Mahler’s Fourth Symphony, which was premiered a few years before Webern composed *Im Sommerwind*. This explanation is plausible, though there is not, to my knowledge, any documentary evidence to support it. See Timothy Judd, ‘Youthful Webern: “Im Sommerwind,” Idyll for Large Orchestra’, *The Listener’s Club*, 29 September 2021, <https://thelistenersclub.com/2021/09/29/youthful-webern-im-sommerwind-idyll-for-large-orchestra/>.

48 Frankenstein, ‘A Webern Work of Real Stature’.

49 Frankenstein, ‘Webern Festival on the Sidelines of a Fair’.

Frankenstein has since been proven right. In the six decades since the First International Webern Festival, works such as the String Quartet (1905) and *Im Sommerwind* have become some of the most frequently performed and recorded of Webern's compositions, in much the same way as Schoenberg's works from the same period (including *Verklärte Nacht*, to which the String Quartet (1905) is often compared) are among that composer's most frequently performed compositions. These and other early works unveiled at the 1962 festival were welcomed into the Webern canon when they were included in Deutsche Grammophon's Pierre Boulez-led complete Webern set, released in 2000, after Boulez's 1978 Columbia set had omitted them.⁵⁰ Performers and audiences, in other words, have accepted these works for what they are: good (and sometimes very good) late Romantic music by a composer who would go on to compose an utterly different kind of music. Why, then, have so many scholars continued to succumb to Cone's second temptation, and rushed to present Webern's plainly Romantic early works as forerunners of modernism?

To answer that question, I return to the words of Thomas Pynchon. In the same letter in which he railed against the Seattle World's Fair, Pynchon reported on his attendance at another cultural event in Seattle: 'I was to a Webern Festival last weekend. Can you think of anything festive about the music of Webern? neither [*sic*] can I. It had nothing to do with the Seattle World's Fair, thank God.' Pynchon went on to call the Webern Festival the work of 'loonies' who sought to honour a composer he described as 'a poor bastard shot in '45 by one of our own dumb, drunk GI's, a poor bastard who was also a great composer even if he was a German and wrote in 12 tones'. 'Nuts like this', Pynchon concluded, 'aren't very frequent.'⁵¹ Eleven years later, in his 1973 novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon put a similar rant into the voice of one of his characters, a composer named Gustav Schalbone.⁵² In this version, Webern's twelve-tone music was no longer merely something to be tolerated, but evidence of his work's importance:

Shot in May, by the Americans. Senseless, accidental if you believe in accidents – some mess cook from North Carolina, some late draftee with a .45 he hardly knew how to use, too late for WW II, but not for Webern. The excuse for raiding the house was that Webern's brother was in the black market. Who isn't? Do you know what kind of myth *that's* going to make in a thousand years? The young barbarians coming in to murder the Last European, standing at the far end of what'd been going on since Bach, an expansion of music's polymorphous perversity till all notes were truly equal at last . . . Where was there to go after Webern? It was

50 For more on the reception of the 1978 set, see David H. Miller, 'Singing Webern, Sounding Webern: Bethany Beardslee, Grace-Lynne Martin, and Marni Nixon, 1950–1957', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 75/1 (2022), 109 ff.

51 Letter, Pynchon to Sale, 28 May 1962.

52 It has been suggested that Pynchon named Schalbone after Gustav Mahler. For more on this topic, along with a discussion of the influence of composers such as Beethoven, Rossini, and Schoenberg on *Gravity's Rainbow*, see Thomas Schaub, 'Atonalism, Nietzsche and *Gravity's Rainbow*: Pynchon's Use of German Music History and Culture', *Pynchon Notes* (2008).

the moment of maximum freedom. It all had to come down. Another Götterdämmerung – ⁵³

Elsewhere in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon depicts an 'oppressive realm of performance, spectacle, and exhibitions known as the 'Raketen-Stadt', a dystopian 'rocket city' that – according to literary scholar Jeffrey Severs – was 'inspired' by Pynchon's experiences at the World's Fair.⁵⁴ Whether in real-world Seattle or the imagined worlds of his creation, then, Pynchon portrayed Webern as a kindred spirit, the two artists aligned against the commercially motivated, mass-appeal nightmare of a future represented as much by the World's Fair as by the Second World War.

Pynchon's encounter with Webern helps explain why those in attendance at the Webern Festival worked so hard to affirm the modernist bona fides of Webern's newly premiered compositions. The inflated historical significance that Webern's music takes on in *Gravity's Rainbow* echoes Webern's own accounts of his music (the best example of which is the series of lectures published as *The Path to the New Music*), as well as many of the accounts delivered over the course of the Webern Festival. In fact, Gustav Schalbhone's teleological account of music history reads almost like a parody of modernist self-presentation. At the centre of all of this is Pynchon's assertion that the Webern Festival had 'nothing to do' with the World's Fair, a statement with which I am confident most Webern Festival attendees would have agreed. For those invested in the modernist tradition that Webern represented, there was (and is) a prestige associated with being perpetually avant-garde, as Webern was (and is) often portrayed to be. Yet the works premiered at the Webern Festival complicated this perspective. They suggested that Webern's revolutionary musical language had not emerged fully formed but had instead grown out of the very Romanticism it appeared to reject. To adopt the language of Pierre Boulez, the Webern Festival proved that Webern was every bit as 'dead' as Schoenberg. His music became music rooted in a particular historical era, which meant that it could no longer plausibly be presented as avant-garde decades later. These conclusions threatened the foundations upon which Webern's post-war prestige rested, so the works that led to them were quickly subsumed within modernist narratives of progress, innovation, and righteousness – both at the Webern Festival itself and, as I have documented earlier, in the scholarship that followed it.

There were, however, at least two people in attendance at the Webern Festival who understood that other approaches were possible: Hans and Rosaleen Moldenhauer. Hans's claim that Webern's music would become known as 'the music of the space age' may have played into modernist tropes, but it was also a transparent attempt to align the Webern Festival with the World's Fair, the purpose of which was presumably to attract the attention of those who

53 Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 440–1. Schalbhone's statement contains two inaccuracies: Webern was killed in September, not May, and it was his son-in-law, not his brother, who was involved in the black market. That being said, the level of detail in Schalbhone's account of Webern's death suggests that Pynchon may well have read *The Death of Anton Webern*, or at the very least press coverage of it.

54 Jeffrey Severs, "'A City of the Future': *Gravity's Rainbow* and the 1962 Seattle World's Fair', *Twentieth-Century Literature* 62/2 (2016), 145.

might not otherwise be interested in a Webern festival. The Moldenhauers took a similar approach over the course of the following two decades as they sought to legitimize Webern's music not by portraying it as ahead of its time, but by identifying more traditional means through which it could garner mainstream acceptance. They organized five more Webern Festivals, in Salzburg, Vienna, Buffalo, NY, Hanover, NH, and Baton Rouge, LA. They worked with publisher Carl Fischer to make sheet music of Webern's early works widely available. In 1979 they published *Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work*, a biography that eschews technical discussions in favour of documenting the composer's everyday life, including the upbringing that shaped his earliest compositions. Unlike Pynchon and many of the other Webern Festival attendees, the Moldenhauers were not content to let Webern's music remain something only specialists could appreciate.

Whether or not a mission like the Moldenhauers' could succeed was the subject of much debate in the days following the first Webern Festival. Louis Guzzo, a reporter at the *Seattle Daily Times*, was sceptical that Webern's music could have any kind of broad appeal:

Only through such a concentration of performances could the 'space age' designation given Webern's music be appreciated. At the same time, the concentration probably left everyone, except musicologists, perhaps, feeling rather inadequate in any attempt at analysis . . . The unprepared ear is likely to miss more than it captures.⁵⁵

Harold Schonberg felt similarly. Following the festival's 'post-Webern' concert, which featured the music of Boulez, Stockhausen, Babbitt, and others, Schonberg contended that those who advocated on Webern's behalf were partially to blame. He argued that Webern's music was 'too abstruse . . . ever to attract a mass audience', and that Webern's 'followers' had made a mistake by emphasizing this abstruse quality.⁵⁶ Others were more optimistic. Ernst Krenek, for example, was encouraged by the quality of the festival's performances:

To me, who had witnessed the harrowing difficulties besetting the performances of Webern's music during his lifetime and who heard time and again that this music was accessible only to a select group, one of the most exhilarating aspects of the Webern Festival was the observation [of] how well entirely uninitiated understood and projected this supposedly esoteric music.⁵⁷

Francean Campbell adopted a similar tone when she noted that the Webern Festival had occurred because 'it is believed by the few that Webern's music should be brought to the many, that in time that music can be brought close to its audience and revealed for its beauty, its strength, and its originality'. Though Campbell conceded that this goal was 'still perhaps a long way off', she felt that the festival 'at least brought it nearer, and made a little history in doing so'.⁵⁸

55 Louis R. Guzzo, 'Hundreds Gather To Hear Webern's "Space Age" Music', *Seattle Daily Times*, 28 May 1962.

56 Harold C. Schonberg, 'Kindness Kills: Webern's Most Ardent Disciples May Succeed in Destroying His Ideals', *New York Times*, 10 June 1962.

57 Letter, Krenek to Moldenhauer, 7 August 1962.

58 Francean Campbell, 'Festival Would Have Astonished Composer Himself', *The Province*, 2 June 1962.

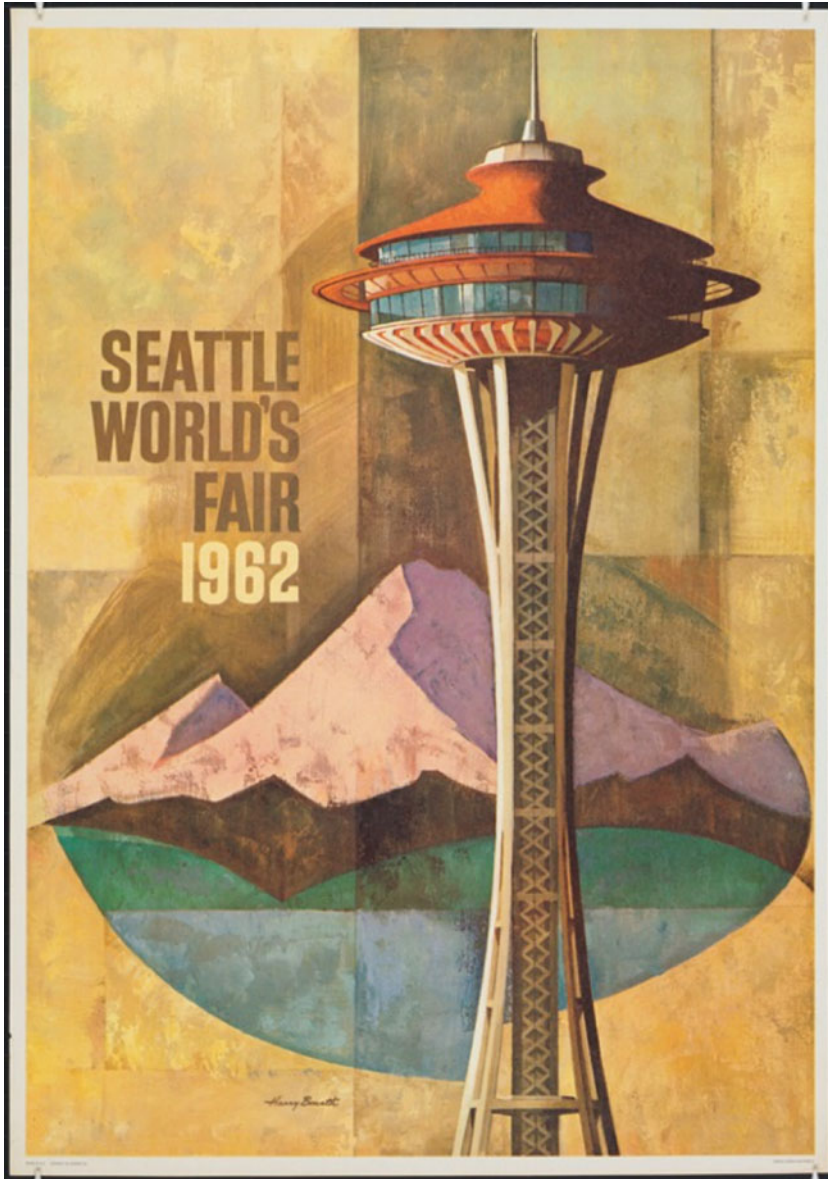


Figure 4 (Colour online) Poster for the Seattle World's Fair. Source: Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA.

Campbell was right. The unexpected pairing of the First International Webern Festival and the Seattle World's Fair may not have brought Webern to the masses, but it did kickstart the Moldenhauers' efforts to elevate Webern's profile, the effects of which have been appreciable. In addition to the increase in performances and recordings noted earlier, the scholarship of the past three decades has done a better job of considering Webern's early works on their own terms – not merely as waypoints along the path to

something better.⁵⁹ Sixty years later, these two events still make for strange bedfellows. The niche appeal of the Webern Festival contrasted with the mass appeal of the World's Fair, and the one way in which the two events aligned – the future-oriented outlook of the World's Fair and Webern's 'music of the space age' – was disrupted by the music premiered at the Webern Festival. Yet these tensions are also evidence of how productive it can be to consider what David Clarke calls 'the relationship (or perceived non-relationship) between phenomena and cultures that we have not, for much of their history, been encouraged to think of or experience together, but which from our contemporary perspective might now be considered in the same frame'.⁶⁰ Sixty years later, I often find myself thinking about Webern's music in the language of the World's Fair. Among the many posters advertising the fair, my favourite features the Space Needle, which dominated the skyline on the Webern Festival's opening night, set against the backdrop of glaciated Mt Rainier, which Ernst Krenek admired as the festival moved to the University of Washington (Figure 4). If there is a lesson to be learned from the First International Webern Festival, it is that Webern's music reflects *both* these icons of the Pacific Northwest. The contrasts between them map on to contrasts within Webern's body of work, between rural and urban, Romantic and modernist, earthly and extraterrestrial. Those contrasts would have appeared that much fainter had the Webern Festival not been set against the backdrop of the World's Fair.

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59 Johnson, for example, strikes an excellent balance in *Webern and the Transformation of Nature*. Though he frequently makes comparisons across different eras of Webern's career, he resists the urge to fold everything into a strictly linear narrative. Instead, he often portrays earlier works and later works as evincing similar musical and aesthetic concerns but exploring those concerns through divergent means of expression. Sebastian Wedler's work represents a more recent example of a similar approach. In addition to Wedler's article cited in note 46, see Sebastian Wedler, *The Tonal Webern: A Physiognomy of Early Modernism* (PhD diss, University of Oxford, 2017).

60 David Clarke, 'Elvis and Darmstadt, or: Twentieth-Century Music and the Politics of Cultural Pluralism', *Twentieth-Century Music* 4/1 (2007), 6.

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