
Chamber Symphony, op. 9



Title	Chamber Symphony for fifteen solo Instruments, op. 9
Time of Origin	1906
Premiere	8 February 1907, Vienna, Großer Musikvereinsaal
Duration	ca. 22 min.

In his "Analyse der Kammersymphonie" (Analysis of the Chamber Symphony) Arnold Schönberg singled out his Chamber Symphony, op. 9 as a "true turning point" in his compositional style. Completed on 25 July 1906 in Rottach-Egern on Tegernsee, the symphony was "the last work of my first period that consists of a single through-composed movement. It has a certain similarity to my first String Quartet, op. 7, which also merged the four movement types of sonata form into a single movement [...]." Schönberg had studied examples of single-movement forms with internal, latent multi-movement structures that superimpose elements of sonata form and sonata cycle in Beethoven's "Große Fuge," Schubert's "Wanderer Fantasie" (Wanderer Fantasy), and Liszt's Sonata in B minor (Schönberg had the scores of these works in his library). The multi-dimensional concept of a form in movements that seamlessly merge into one another (Exposition – Scherzo – Development – Adagio – Recapitulation), a wealth of motivic and thematic material (Alban Berg identifies 19 themes in his analysis of the "Kammersymphonie") and a complex harmonic content (combining tonal, whole-tone, and quartal harmonies) reveal in op. 9 the multiplicity of perspective that represents the "turning point" in the composer's artistic development: the aversion to late-romantic orchestral sound and the ensuing 'emancipation of dissonance.' "After having finished the composition of the 'Kammersymphonie,' it was not only the expectation of success that filled me with joy. It was another, more important matter. I believed I had now found my own personal style of composing and that all problems [...] had been solved, and that a way had been shown out of the bewildering problems we young composers faced when dealing with the harmonic, formal, orchestral and emotional innovations of Richard Wagner." ("How One Becomes Lonely," 1937) The first documentary evidence of the "Kammersymphonie" is found in Schönberg's sketchbook in chronological proximity to an orchestral work sketched at the end of 1905. His preoccupation with larger sound resources in this period is evident, although it is uncertain to what extent the draft of the work with this exact scoring was connected to the plan for a symphony. However, one could speculate – against Anton Webern's opinion that op. 9 bears the "character of a chamber music composition" – that the spirit of the work corresponds a priori to a condensation of symphonic form that draws upon chamber-music techniques. Just a few weeks after the completion of op. 9, Schönberg drafted the first section of his Second Chamber Symphony, which, after many interruptions, was finally completed in 1939 and became op. 38. The definition of the 'symphonic' lay for Schönberg in a "panorama where

one could indeed regard each image individually, but in reality these images are tightly connected and interwoven." The superimposition of images at a musical level finds its parallel in the intertwining of formal sections, whose conciseness and economy reflect an important progressive impulse in the formal arrangement of a symphonic work around 1906, since the acoustically dense instrumentation assumes a structural function within the composition. The premiere of the first "Kammersymphonie" (by the renowned 'Ensemble der Bläservereinigung des Wiener Hofopernorchesters' and the Rosé Quartet in the 'Großer Musikvereinsaal' on 8 February 1907), provoked what for that time was an unprecedented number of unfavorable critiques. Richard Strauss, to whom Schönberg would offer the work for fifteen solo instruments the following year (without success, however, as was the case before the premiere), replied on 27 September 1908 that it was not suitable "for large orchestral concerts without soloists" and "must absolutely be performed in a smaller hall." Schönberg attempted to solve the practical dilemma by preparing new arrangements, the first in March 1913 for a concert by the Akademischer Verband für Literatur und Musik (Academic League for Literature and Music), which he himself conducted and for which he chose a more fully scored version for string orchestra and ten solo winds. Yet even at this performance in the 'Großer Musikvereinsaal' the acoustical balance proved to be less than ideal, prompting further "retouching and improvements that would contribute significantly to improving the sound and achieving clarity." (letter to Arthur Nikisch, 31 January 1914) A subscription invitation from the Heller Concert Agency in the spring of 1918 indicates that Schönberg presented his "Kammersymphonie" in "ten public rehearsals" as an experiment intended to assist the uninitiated "to be able to follow from the very beginning the preparation of such a difficult work." In 1922, the plan to publish the orchestral arrangement failed. A year after his emigration to the United States, Arnold Schönberg again took up the study score (published in 1923-24) and informed his Vienna publisher – Universal Edition – of the plan for yet another arrangement, which "(based on my experience) would greatly reduce the performance difficulties, so that the Chamber Symphony could finally take its place in concert life." (letter of 28 October 1934) In the spring of 1935, he sent a personal copy of op. 9 to his son Georg and asked him to prepare a print on transparent paper with the stipulation that "under no circumstances should anyone" be told about it. Modifications in the treatment of the orchestra, aimed at the capabilities of American orchestras (as a cost-cutting measure, instruments were notated at concert pitch) finally convinced Schönberg to rearrange the work as op. 9b. After the first performance in Los Angeles on December 27, 1936, with Schönberg himself conducting, he wrote to Anton Webern: "Now it sounds completely clear and lucid, perhaps a bit too loud, which may be because I did not venture away enough from the original."

Therese Muxeneder | © Arnold Schönberg Center, Wien
www.schoenberg.at