

Anton Webern: Sketches

In addition to the five sketchbooks (1926–1945), which have already attracted many Webern scholars, the Paul Sacher Stiftung possesses numerous other sketches (to both completed and uncompleted works) which mainly predate them. My work during my one-year stay in Basel was concerned with sketches dated between 1914 and 1925. Contrary to the bound sketchbooks, in which Webern's compositional process can be traced relatively easily, the loose-leaf format and the erratic and often nonexistent dating (nearly a quarter are undated) which characterize this sketch material, demand scholarly circumspection when attempting to ascertain the chronological sequence to an opus. My study was further complicated by Webern's unmethodical creative activities. For example, he attempted the setting of one poem only to leave it after a few measures for another; he then returned to the first poem, again abandoning it unfinished, and only after a couple of years did he finally complete a setting that in fact differed from any of the preceding essays. Such an unsystematic *modus operandi* led to the beautiful song cycles Opp. 12–17, the compositional processes of which are amply documented by hundreds of pages of sketches. Musicological history clearly indicates the frequent ineffectiveness, and even precariousness, of stylistic analysis as a chronological guideline. A prerequisite for any exhaustive and perceptive research into Webern's compositional process derived from these sketches must therefore presuppose a comprehensive knowledge of their chronology, essential information that unfortunately, with regard to these sketches, remains often exiguous. It is a commonplace that Webern's path to dodecaphonic composition was arduous, entailing a struggle that is excellently reflected in these fascinating sketches which merit further detailed study.