



The first 12-note congress: Orselina, 1948. Wladimir Vogel at the head of the table. (Image: unknown)

## Helvetia through a Twelve-Note Lens

This project will chart the history of Arnold Schoenberg's 12-note method of composition in Switzerland, from its initial reception in ca 1923 via its heyday in the late 1940s and 1950s to its decline towards the end of the century, as post-Modernism and neo-tonality asserted themselves. Two subprojects will focus on the composer Robert Blum and the musician, psychoanalyst and writer Aline Valangin respectively.

Dieses Projekt zeichnet die Geschichte von Arnold Schönbergs Zwölftontechnik in der Schweiz nach – von ihrer frühen Rezeption um 1923 über ihre Blütezeit in den späten 1940er- und 1950er-Jahren bis hin zur Ablösung durch die Postmoderne und Neotonalität am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts. In zwei Teilprojekten stehen zudem der Komponist Robert Blum bzw. die Musikerin, Psychoanalytikerin und Schriftstellerin Aline Valangin im Blick.

**Introduction:** The early 20th century saw the gradual dissolution of functional tonality in Western music. Several composers constructed alternative systems of musical organisation, the most significant of them – from today's perspective – being the "12-note method" developed by Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) in ca 1921. It remained a largely localised phenomenon until the 1930s, when Schoenberg and several of his students were forced into exile by the advent of the Nazis, thereby facilitating the international dissemination of his ideas. After World War II, his 12-note method came to be regarded by the post-war generation of composers as the new "norm" for aspiring composers keen to be at the aesthetic forefront.

**Methods:** Switzerland was one of the very first countries whose composers engaged with Schoenberg's method, adapting it to meet their own needs. This project will chart the history of Arnold Schoenberg's 12-note method in Switzerland, from its initial reception in ca 1923 via its heyday in the late 1940s and 1950s to its decline towards the end of the century, as post-Modernism and neo-tonality asserted themselves. Its intersection with politics and political aesthetics will be investigated, along with transnational aspects of the method. Key points in the history of its Swiss reception were the ISCM Festival in Zurich in 1926, the world premières in Zurich of Berg's *Lulu* and Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* in 1937 and 1957 respectively, and the first-ever 12-note congress in Orselina in 1948.

**Results:** The project outputs will include an overarching history of the method in Switzerland; a doctoral thesis on the composer Robert Blum (1900–1994), who began in a Busonian neoclassicism and moved through the *Gebrauchsmusik* of film to a late adoption of Schoenberg's 12-note method; and a monograph on the musician, psychoanalyst, writer and patron Aline Valangin (1889–1986), who was one of the driving forces behind Swiss Modernism in music during and after World War II.

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