

philharmonia orchestra

Christian Meyer:

He wasn't only a composer and teacher: he was a painter, for some years he was a music theorist writing an important theory of harmony, he was a teacher as we said before, he was an inventor. He thought about 'how can this be solved, when three motorways are meeting each other and someone wants to get from every motorway from every direction into every other direction, how does this work?' – so this was like training of his brain which he took.

Julian Johnson:

Christian, sitting here in the library of the Arnold Schoenberg Centre, perhaps we might start just by talking about what sort of man Arnold Schoenberg was.

Christian Meyer:

Fortunately we are still close enough to Arnold Schoenberg since his children still live, they are on our board – in fact Maria is the president of our foundation – so through them we can still have a very lively impression of Arnold Schoenberg. And then we have film materials about Schoenberg, we see how he was; whenever Schoenberg comes into the picture he is talking, so this gives an impression of a person. He must have always been talking, just as he always was working. His legacy is so big that he must have constantly worked throughout his life to have been able to produce these materials.

Julian Johnson:

Although Schoenberg's life was dedicated to music, of course he did plenty of other things. His great other passion in life was painting, but also a great inventor. We're standing here in front of a reconstruction of his own invented game, Coalition Chess, for four players, and you can see that each individual player has quite different pieces. The rules of this escape me completely, but it's a good example of Schoenberg's continuous invention in almost every area.

Christian Meyer:

Still I think these pieces are shockingly fresh. Sometimes I have this impression when I listen to a chamber symphony or to the Piano Concerto, it's still so new.

Julian Johnson:

It was a model for many writers too wasn't it, that ideal of music.

Christian Meyer:

When you think about *Ulysses* by James Joyce, this has lots of musical aspects. And with *Ulysses* what James Joyce does is invent a language of his own to write this magnificent work; and that's what Schoenberg does, he invents a new musical language to be able to express his musical thoughts. And of course this makes it so complicated to understand it. And while with *Ulysses* this is accepted, this is really hard to read, and you probably need a commentary to find out the beauties of *Ulysses*, people think they can just go into the Schoenberg Piano Concerto and listen to it and then they say, wow. But firstly it's extremely beautiful music, and secondly if people take the time to prepare at least for a few minutes then they get a lot more out of it, just like with *Ulysses*.