

ALBAN BERG DEAD; MODERN COMPOSER

Author of 'Wozzeck' and 'Lulu,'
First 12-Tone Atonal Operas
—Work Praised and Hissed.

A PUPIL OF SCHOENBERG

Attended Orchestral Concert in
Vienna Two Weeks Ago of
Excerpts From 'Lulu.'

Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

VIENNA, Dec. 24. — Alban Berg, noted Viennese modernist composer, died early this morning in a Vienna hospital of blood poisoning resulting from a carbuncle. He had been ill for a little more than a fortnight. Despite a high fever, he attended a concert of the Symphonic Orchestra here two weeks ago to hear the first performance in Vienna of excerpts from his "Lulu," and at the close of the piece was called many times to the stage, amid both cheers and hisses. Berg would have been 51 years old in February.

Although Berg declared more than a year ago that he had only two months' more work on the instrumentation of his new opera, "Lulu," it is still incomplete. A large part of the last act remains to be orchestrated in full, although the composer had sketched the scoring in considerable detail. It is believed in Viennese musical circles that Ernst Krenek, or some other modernist familiar with Berg's intentions, may undertake to finish the instrumentation. Berg left no other unfinished work.

Important Atonalism Expert.

Of the three modernists in the opera field—Berg, Stravinsky, Hindemith—Alban Berg was the most important if not the most extreme exponent of atonalism. He carried it so far that to the unpracticed ear some of his work suggested Chinese music.

When his opera "Wozzeck" was first produced in Vienna in the Spring of 1930, the management of the State Opera, anticipating difficulty from the audience, posted fifty policemen in the house. Berg, the director, and the cast of the opera, on the contrary, received innumerable curtain calls from a wildly enthusiastic audience.

The composer was 38 years old when his first major stage work, composed in the so-called "atonal" style, was prepared in piano scoring and published at his own expense. It was the first opera formulated on entirely new principles of form, and Berg's first attempt to consider social problems by means of the musical stage. The Allgemeiner deutscher Musikverein included fragments from the opera in the Frankfurt musical festivals in 1924. A success was achieved under the direction of Hermann Scherchen that soon was followed by other concert performances.

The Berlin Opera under Erich Kleiber gave the world premiere in December, 1925. That performance became known for its artistic perfection. Prague, Leningrad, Zurich, Brussels produced it, it was presented at the musical festivals in Liège, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and Stokowski, with a number of prominent artists, gave a masterly performance in Philadelphia, which was later repeated at the Metropolitan Opera House.

Began 'Wozzeck' in 1914.

Berg began the composition of "Wozzeck" in 1914, but owing to the interruption of the World War did not complete the score until 1922. His story is based on the play of the same name by Georg Büchner, a poet of the early nineteenth century, who died when he was 24 and whose work did not come to light until many years later. Berg condensed it in twenty-six scenes and three acts. The story deals with a soldier, Franz Wozzeck, who is brutally exploited by his comrades and deceived by his beloved Marie. When he learns of her unfaithfulness he stabs her and drowns himself.

In his opera "Lulu," Berg combined two of Wedekind's dramas, "Erdgeist" (Earth Spirit), and "Buechse der Pandora" (Pandora's Box). The seven acts of these two dramas became in the opera seven scenes of two acts. The turning point is marked by an entr'acte, which divided the fate of the heroine, Lulu, into two two parts, one act of ascent, the other of descent. The first American performances of "Symphonic Pieces from the Opera 'Lulu'" were given in this country in March of this year by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Dr. Serge Koussevitzky. Five fragments from the opera at its world premiere at the Berlin Staatsoper on Nov. 30, 1934, evoked a demonstration of riotous enthusiasm seldom equaled in the annals of musical modernism.

In this opus, the composer renounced neither his twelve tones technique nor his employment for dramatic purposes of certain learned forms of classicism. But he used them to a different purpose and to quite another effect than in "Wozzeck." Presented by the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Otto Klemperer in Carnegie Hall last November, the music critic of The New York Times said:

"After a second performance of the excerpts from 'Lulu,' this reviewer is moved to remark that he considers them involved trash, as he did at the first hearing (by the Boston Symphony Orchestra last April), and a score that will not outlast the decade that gave it birth. * * * The score can find no basis for a genuinely utterance. Even such highly flavored material gives the composer no fruitful inspiration."

Native of Vienna.

Alban Berg was born on Feb. 9, 1885, in Vienna. His father, Conrad Berg, was a well-to-do merchant from Nuernberg. A change of circumstances made it necessary for the 18-year-old young man to content himself with finding a petty position in public service. Chance, perhaps fate, led him, who until then had received no regular musical instruction, to Arnold Schoenberg, who became his teacher and friend.

His personality showed a development which went hand in hand with the development of new music. He made two settings of a poem by Theodor Storm, "Schliesse

mir die Augen beide," one in 1900, the other in 1925. In between lay the whole development from tonal music to the twelve-tone system. The one movement piano sonata in B minor, designated Opus 1, appeared in 1908, when Berg had relinquished his position and could devote himself entirely to music.

To the same period belong "Four Songs," preceded by the "Seven Early Songs" and bearing the dedication, "To my Helene," his wife, daughter of Franz and Anna Nahowski, whom he married in 1911. The string quartet, presented here at the opening concert of the League of Composers in the Town Hall in October, 1926, is also dedicated to her. A second group is made up of the "Five Orchestral Poems After the Texts by Peter Altenberg," and the "Four Pieces" for clarinet and piano. They are dedicated to Arnold Schoenberg and bear the mark of impressionism.

"Three Orchestral Pieces" were written in 1914. It was followed by the "Chamber Concerto" for piano, violin and thirteen wind instruments. In the "Lyric Suite" (1926) Berg used the twelve-tone system in a large measure. The last work before the appearance of "Lulu" was the concertaria "Wine" (1929). From the poem of Baudelaire were taken three parts, "The Soul of Wine," the "Wine of the Lover," and the "Wine of the Lonely."

Berg wrote a poem of dedication to Arnold Schoenberg, in which he inscribed his opera, "Lulu," to his master on the occasion of the latter's sixtieth anniversary. In acrostic, read from top to bottom, it presented the three words, "Faith, Hope, Love." It also started with them and read as follows:

"Faith and hope—and love for Geermann usic, with your inimitable teaching, you once awakened in me. But with it there grew in me also faith, hope and love for you—who, as master and friend, gave me both friendship and instruction through three decades, in which you upheld enduring values."