

Oxford Mail & Times

EGON WELLESZ

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1885-1974

EGON WELLESZ was born in 1885, the son of a Viennese Fabrikant. From his mother, Ilona Lovenyi, he inherited his love of music. Vienna had claims at that time to be the musical capital of Europe, and with music in his blood he found himself as a boy already deeply affected by its traditions. Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert had lived and worked there. Brahms was appointed Director of the Vienna Singakademie in 1869, the year in which the great new Opera House with its incomparable acoustics was opened. But Wellesz's education was not originally planned as that of a musician. He attended the Franz Joseph *Gymnasium*, famous for its teaching of the classical languages and literature, and of history. This training proved to be the point of departure for some of the most important things in his life: not only for the themes of operas, but particularly for the freedom it was to offer him of the region of scholarship in which he was to achieve special distinction—that of the Greek liturgy, and of the music associated with it.

He used to ascribe his 'conversion' as it were to the career of composer, to two experiences encountered at the age of thirteen. He heard Mahler conduct the opera *Der Freischütz*; and a little later, in a Philharmonic concert, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. He began forthwith to write music, and set himself to master musical techniques, over and above the classical curriculum, which already interested him far beyond what his teachers demanded. And he used to look back, as if on another moment of revelation, to the loan, by a friend a little older than himself, of a score of the Ninth Symphony, with Mahler's alterations. So began his interest in musicology. Mahler's influence came to him not only, perhaps not even primarily, through performances of the composer's own works, but above all in his interpretations. In this score, Mahler realized, so Wellesz declared, the sounds Beethoven had intended, even though they lay outside the instrumental resources of his own day. Other conductors had already introduced modifications into the instrumentation of Beethoven's score. Mahler, exploiting the whole range of improved instrumental technique, took the final steps to free the work from the imperfections of the original scoring.

He used to tell a story of Mahler conducting a rehearsal of his own (Mahler's) Second Symphony which serves as a comment on that judgement. The soloist was Selma Kurz, with a beautiful and clear but not very powerful voice. When the orchestra reached the passage *O Tod! Du Allbezwinger! Nun bist du bezwungen*, the trombones are directed in the score to play the chords *pianissimo*. At rehearsal, despite several repetitions of the passage, the vocal line of the melody remained too weak. Making up his mind in a flash, Mahler said 'We'll leave out the trombones'; and then added solemnly 'Blessed is the conductor who performs my scores as the hall's acoustics demand'. And if an original score was not, as such, sacrosanct, if Mahler 'improved' Beethoven in ways which as Wellesz was to write seventy years later 'we sometimes feel somewhat dated', with Mozart on the contrary Mahler was the first to rediscover the real sound of the original scoring, at a time when the full sonority of the romantic orchestra was regarded as the ideal orchestration for Mozart. Mahler performed the operas with a small body of strings, and himself accompanied the recitative on a harpsichord by the conductor's desk. This refusal to be limited by a doctrinaire approach, and readiness to appreciate differences in different individual applications of a principle, was according to Wellesz another of his debts to Mahler.

Yet another was due to the conductor's performances of Wagner. These revealed what was meant by the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the demand for new methods of production to match perfectly the words and music of the opera. This idea of the wholeness of a work of art was to influence not only his continuing interest in opera, but also, it may not be fanciful to say, his critical studies of Byzantine music. He was there to insist on the importance of words and music being taken together in the Byzantine liturgy, and his deeply religious outlook imparted a unique quality to his appreciation. Thus he was not simply examining an interesting and hitherto obscure period of musical history, but suggesting a new and complex experience, in which words, music, and even the architectural splendour of the churches for which these works were created and the richness of the vestments in which the performers were clothed, all played their part. This was why he reproduced, as frontispiece to his *Byzantine Music and Hymnology*, a picture of two of the Comneni in their gorgeous vestments.

One feature of these years when Wellesz was growing up is the way in which he became a part of the brilliant Viennese scene,

not merely a spectator of it from the outside, when he was still hardly more than a boy. Kokoschka's portrait of him, now in America, shows him already as an intensely vital personality, and it must have been sheer personality and charm, setting off his ability, which made these early successes possible. But part of the explanation of his association with Mahler is that music still meant actual performance, experienced in the concert hall; not broadcasts or records. This made the hearing of a symphony something akin to a religious experience, a theophany. 'I sat once or twice a week' he wrote,

in the famous Fourth Gallery of the Opera House, together with other young musical enthusiasts. His [Mahler's] image, as it appeared so often before my eyes, remains unalterably fixed on my mind. It is hardly possible to describe the tense excitement which took hold of us before the beginning of a performance. The house was in complete silence except for the tuning of the instruments. Then it went dark, the only light coming from the orchestra. We asked ourselves anxiously, is he going to conduct?—for in those days the name of the conductor was not announced on the programme. Suddenly a slim figure with a flowing mane of black hair rushed forward and hurriedly took his seat at the desk. A sigh of relief went through the audience. A short beat of the baton, cutting short the applause, and the performance began. These performances belonged to a world no longer ours. Music was, to quote the young composer in Hofmannsthal's *Ariadne* 'a holy art', and each performance was an event which for days cast its spell over us.

In some ways even more important than the performances themselves were rehearsals of operas and symphonies which Mahler allowed his young friends to attend. So they became not simply devotees, but disciples. Thus Mahler's departure from Vienna for New York was a sad blow for Wellesz. He never saw him again, though Mahler cabled when Wellesz married in 1908.

Wellesz had learnt of Schönberg's reputation as a teacher of musical theory, even before he left school, and was still a school-boy when he first asked to be taken on as a pupil. It was arranged that when Wellesz had reached the university his tuition in counterpoint and fugue with Schönberg should begin. He was due to enter the Legal Faculty, this being the normal preparation at that time for the Civil Service, or for the commercial career his father planned for him. But while parents propose, they do not always dispose. Wellesz registered with the Legal Faculty, but its programme was flexible, and he spent his time in lectures and seminars in the nearby Musicological

Institute of Professor Guido Adler, first holder of the Chair of Musical History in Vienna. In the second year the subject for a doctoral thesis was normally chosen. One of his contemporaries, Ernst Kurth, later a distinguished musicologist, was to write on Gluck's early operas; and Wellesz chose as his subject the operas and oratorios of Guiseppe Bonno, one of Gluck's contemporaries.

By this time he was already engaged to be married, though his future wife was still a schoolgirl. Their marriage, which took place eventually in 1908, was to bring him a happiness of which it is difficult to speak except in superlatives. His life was to be lived out, after all, in an era that was not easy: the First World War, which reduced his Vienna politically almost to the status of a Balkan capital, though its cultural renewal after the war was to be so astonishing: then the growth of the Nazi régime, menacing the values by which he lived, and eventually forcing his exile; then the Second World War and the appalling devastation of Vienna, devastation in which many of his friends, one way or another, suffered. The writer has a picture in his memory of Vienna in the summer of 1946: the streets in the centre masses of rubble, through cuttings in which trams, with would-be passengers clinging to their sides like flies on a window, clanged their way—and of the hunger in the city, and the fields in that sector of the Austrian countryside, stripped utterly of stock by the victors. That Wellesz came through these experiences (and searing experiences even if vicarious they were, for those who had strong associations with, and close friends still living in, Vienna, though themselves in England or America) was to an immeasurable extent due to his wife. It was indeed in some ways an unusual alliance. One of his sons-in-law tells how, when he had decided to marry their daughter (still at school then, as Emmy had been when Egon courted her) he arranged to meet his father-in-law on the neutral ground of one of the Vienna coffee houses. 'I said that I felt I should make my intentions known, so that there should not always be queries when I came to see her.' '“This you have to discuss with my wife” said Egon with his inimitable smile, “I always leave everything disagreeable to her.”' And it was in fact Emmy who took the shock of real trouble and difficulties, and her complete understanding and support were, throughout, the background of his achievement.

An anecdote he used to tell shows how early this began. His apprenticeship with Schönberg soon made him realize that the

great man was desperately poor. He was also his own worst enemy, with a touchiness and pride that often stepped over into arrogance. 'His habit was to wander restlessly round the room, head thrust forward, hands behind his back, as one can see him from his self-portrait, smoking one cigarette after another and with his always rather hoarse voice jerking out explanations of his theories.' Schönberg had already by chance been introduced to the headmistress of Emmy's school, the admirable but also somewhat formidable Eugenie Schwarzwald. This introduction had been effected originally by Adolf Loos, whom she had commissioned to design the furnishings of her school, and thanks to him and to the Welleszes, it was arranged that the school buildings be put at Schönberg's disposal, on free afternoons during winter and spring, to be used as a sort of independent conservatoire. About this time she engaged Kokoschka, who was disliked in official circles, as drawing master, while Egon himself conducted once a week a small choir. It was a galaxy of talent. But Schönberg's part in the exercise proved unsuccessful. Though he was no business genius, the failure was not primarily due to inefficiency, but because his brilliance was misunderstood. The musical correspondents who played a large part in forming Viennese musical opinion were savage critics of his innovations. The acceptance of his work was still in the future. When it came, it was in considerable measure due to Wellesz's support in articles and books.

Vienna was not only the home of a great musical tradition. A historian, recently describing what he characterized as that 'cultural hothouse', linked the intensity of its cultural life with the political decay of the régime. 'When the empire was beginning to dissolve, and the political constitution showed signs of *rigor mortis*, an almost unprecedented creativity and vigour began to show itself in the intellectual and artistic life of the middle class.' The new music was a part of this wider movement. The group of artists and architects who broke away from the Künstlerhaus, forming the *Sezession*, and founded in 1897 the periodical *Ver Sacrum*, had become increasingly influential in the following years, under the leadership of Gustav Klimt. The atmosphere was as far as it could be from the *fin de siècle*. Wellesz and his friends saw, not the decay of a venerable culture, but the beginning of a great new movement, intellectual as well as aesthetic. Schönberg was pre-eminent because he was an articulate figure in the movement. He was already extending

the range of rhythmic, harmonic, and contrapuntal possibilities at the time when Wellesz was working most closely with him. His pupils, recognizing his masterly powers of analysis as applied to the great music of the past, accepted the quality of his own scores as equally masterly. When the F-sharp Minor Quartet was played by the Rosé Quartet in 1908 and was received with mockery by part of the audience (and the critic of the *Tageblatt* shouted 'stop' to the players) their loyalty to him was strengthened. Wellesz recalled the first Impressionist exhibition, staged by the *Sezession*, 'From Monet to Seurat', in which he was struck by the analogies between Schönberg's method of composition and that of the *pointilliste* painters. In showing Wellesz the score of *Erwartung* Schönberg, who had himself begun to paint those somewhat terrifying 'expressionist' pictures, spoke about the *pointilliste* intermingling of colour dots, and the disconnected way in which the musical themes in *Erwartung* followed one another. This linking together of ideas from different arts was typical of the *Sezession's* adherents. Art was too important a part of life to be divided.

The Schwarzwalds, who remained close friends of the Wellesz pair, kept open house on Sundays, and their guests included many of the *Sezession* notables: artists and architects—Adolf Loos, with his eminently rational ideas of what a house or a school should be like, was one; the young Kokoschka with his explosive energy another; Scandinavian poets and writers; professors of classics, civil servants, diplomats, psychoanalysts, left-wing politicians—though the group seems to have never been in danger of being cornered by political interests. It was here that Wellesz met Rilke. His op. 7 *Lieder der Mädchen* is a setting of three Rilke poems for voice and piano. And he continued from this time onwards to move among an intellectual élite; writers who produced *libretti* for him; musicians whose ideas he examined and discussed with them (ideas which are in many instances represented in his archive of letters); artists and intellectuals who set the key, as it were, for a career in which the liveliest interest in new ideas and unusual work as well as in solid academic or artistic achievement continued to the end. One of the things his family remember best about their childhood is the constant flow of visitors to the house; another, 'Papi's' indefatigable industry. He seemed to need little sleep, and was often at work by five in the morning. It was these things that made the wide range of his associations possible. He was able to exploit life on half-a-dozen fronts at once. It

seems hardly believable for instance that during the years following his marriage he was still working in his father's office; and the energy with which he sustained not only those duties, but a programme that included composing, research, and an enormously varied social life, was prodigious. He completed his dissertation 'Giuseppe Bonno, 1710-1788, his Life and Work' in 1908 *summa cum laude*; and then at Adler's suggestion prepared himself for the *Dozentur*. His thesis for that, *Studies in the History of Viennese Opera: Cavalli and the Venetian Style* appeared in 1913, and in that year he was appointed lecturer in musical history. It was at this time that he came into contact with Strzygowski, with whom his wife was studying art history, during that scholar's great period. It was a contact which was to prove, for Wellesz also, very fruitful.

Wellesz began to travel early. He spent six weeks in England in 1906, attending lectures on English, History, and Music in Cambridge. There he met Dent, who shared his interest in eighteenth-century opera, and he spent some time in Paris on his way back. He began his acquaintance with Debussy's music in the first year of his marriage, through Harry Löwy, a pupil of Schreker. The experience was of deep importance to him. He heard in it, 'new sounds from the piano', sounds belonging nevertheless 'to the real nature of the instrument'. It was, he said, 'the transparency of Debussy's music which helped to liberate him from the influence of post-Wagnerian music'. In 1909 he met, at an international music congress in Vienna, Jules Ecorcheville, editor of the *Revue Musicale*. They became close friends, and for him he wrote (1912) an article 'Schönberg et la jeune école Viennoise'. For while he remained all his life passionately Viennese, he became when still young a citizen of the world. Music of his had already been performed in Budapest before the visit he records as taking place in connection with an exhibition arranged by a group of young artists, when Emmy Heim sang some of his songs. Balázs, whom Wellesz knew already, had recently written the libretto for Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*. It was a story to be understood on more than one level, something which always appealed to Wellesz—like his own first opera, *Princess Gornara*. 'Bluebeard', Balázs told him, 'was the man who keeps enclosed in his heart all the experiences of his life. A woman can unlock the doors and set them free. But if she opens the last chamber and enters it, she steps from light into darkness, and becomes an experience herself.' In a sense it is inconsequential; but it is intentionally

mysterious, magical, and sinister. Those qualities were to him the key to Bartók's music. On the visit, Wellesz's songs and piano pieces were part of a programme also including works by Bartók and Kodály. And this was to have one noteworthy result for him. His first work to appear in print was *Der Abend*, a cycle of four impressions for piano, which shows the influence of Viennese models and also of Debussy. Its publication took place thanks to the good offices of Bartók, who introduced Wellesz, on this occasion, to his own publisher, Rózsavölgyi. During the first decade or so of his creative life, his energies had been mainly centred on piano and vocal music though there were occasional forays such as his *Sinfonischen Prolog*, op. 2 (1905), the tone-poem *Vorfrühling* (1911), as well as a setting for solo soprano, female chorus, and orchestra of Rilke, *Gebet der Mädchen zu Maria*, op. 5. Although the works of this period are basically diatonic in language, the *Drei Skizzen* (1911) show a more highly developed chromatic awareness derived no doubt from his studies with Schönberg. It is a commonplace that throughout his creative career Wellesz's music reflected the strength of his roots in the Viennese tradition; from the Mahlerian accents of the First Quartet to the no less Mahlerian stance to be observed in the Symphony No. 1, op. 62, which he wrote at the end of the Second World War in 1945. The distinctly Debussian overtones in the 'Pastorale' from the *Drei Skizzen* are noteworthy: Wellesz shared Schönberg's admiration for the French master, and indeed maintained close connections not only with French music of the generation of Debussy and Ravel but with younger figures such as Poulenc and Milhaud when they became active after the First World War. In the bulk of these early works one can observe the gradual erosion of tonality without there ever being a complete breakdown of key relationships. The sense of line, always strong in Wellesz, becomes increasingly angular but it is never unrelated to a key centre.

Another strong link with Bartók was an interest in folk melodies, and some years later Wellesz was able to repay in kind the good turn done him by Bartók by securing the publication of an article based on the collection made in North Africa, over many years, by Bartók and Kodály. They were, incidentally, already using a phonograph to record what they discovered. Copies of Bartók's letters are one interesting feature of the Wellesz archive in Vienna, for he had already begun to think of his own life as part of the musical history of the time and to

store away documentation for it. But with Bartók there was a special link: 'Bartók and Kodály' he explained, 'felt that in the second half of the nineteenth century there was too much concern with the intensification of harmony which in its turn had a decisive influence on melodic development. . . . They [the two Hungarian composers] formed their own musical language by assimilating the music of folksong and drama.' The comment is very significant also of his own musical and musicological development.

But this is to anticipate. There is a portrait sketch of Wellesz, done in Berlin in 1912, by Fritz Lederer. It shows a young man, good looking as he was always to remain, enormously confident in the talent which was already beginning to be recognized—he was twenty-seven—both in Vienna and by a much wider circle of friends, critics, and scholars.




And then, a thunderbolt out of that seeming blue sky, came war. Wellesz had recently undergone a serious operation, and for him there was no question of military service, as there was for Schönberg and many others, including his friend Ecorcheville, killed later in France, fighting on 'the other side'. All thoughts of further composing were locked away for the war's duration. He turned more and more to his musicological studies, and worked, at this time especially, in Strzygowski's Institute for the History of Art, where he found resources available to him that were by no means limited to art history in the strict sense. He came across there, for example, an essay on the musical notation of the Greek Church by the palaeographer Gardthausen, with the challenging view expressed that 'the problem of the meaning of these signs is so difficult that it is unlikely it will ever be solved'. Wellesz became as he describes in the memoir, 'absorbed in the study of Byzantine history and civilization, and of its church and liturgy', and he began to work on Greek palaeography. And then, he records laconically, 'in 1917 I found the key to the deciphering of Byzantine musical notation'.

When Wellesz wrote this, he was certainly not putting forward an exclusive claim to a unique discovery. There were—as there almost always must be—predecessors who made contributions without which his could hardly have been achieved, or if achieved would have come much later. Yet this discovery is of special interest because the two men each working on it without knowledge of the other, H. J. W. Tillyard in Cambridge and

Wellesz in Vienna, not only reached substantially the same conclusions independently, but also never quarrelled about priority, and when each came to know the other's work after the war, each was astonished and delighted to find how close to his own theories were those of the other; and this led rapidly not to rivalry and conflicting claims, but to an intimate collaboration—to be joined somewhat later by the Dane, Carsten Høeg, whose head for organization and finance made a great contribution. Høeg first saw the implications for Slavonic chant.

Wellesz's distinguished pupil, Professor Dimitri Conomos of Vancouver, has summarized¹ what happened thus:

Wellesz made a careful examination of the late Byzantine treatises contained in the *Papadikai* (musical handbooks and anthologies of chant) one of which was published in facsimile as early as 1904 by Oskar Fleischer (*Die spätgriechische Noten-Schrift: Neumen-Studien*, iii, Berlin, 1904). Wellesz did not decipher the notation in the sense that he discovered the meaning of all the melodic symbols. This had already been revealed by Fleischer himself. The main problem lay with rhythm and tonality, and it is there that both Tillyard and Wellesz came to much the same conclusions at much the same time. In fact Tillyard published results in 1911 (*Annual of the British School of Athens*, xviii) and 1916 (*ibid.* xxii) whereas Wellesz's article appeared in 1918 (*Oriens Christianus*, n.s. vii); although we are certain that they reached their conclusions independently, since neither was aware of the other's publications until 1922. After that time they both read each other's articles, and were amazed at the degree of concordance that they had achieved in their studies and results.

The problem was this: in Byzantine notation, each melodic step was accorded one particular sign, except the interval of the ascending second which had six different neumes. Why was this so? And why were the six signs of the ascending second so often combined with the other interval signs? Why again when these combinations occurred, did the neume of the second lose its intervallic value, leaving only the other neume to be sung? Independently, Tillyard and Wellesz both realized that these six signs were not only for upward progression, but they also represented a musical dynamic, a stress or accent; and when this neume was combined with another, only its 'dynamic' aspect came into effect. In other words, we have the sign  meaning the ascending second with a strong accent, and the sign  meaning an ascending fifth (no dynamic indicated). When the two are combined thus: , we now have an ascending fifth to be sung with a strong accent, the intervallic quality of the lower neume losing its value. Fleischer was transcribing the notes correctly, but he did not differentiate the

¹ In a letter written to me in connection with this memoir.

rhythmic and dynamic qualities which the neumes demanded. This constitutes the primary contribution of Wellesz and Tillyard to the more precise understanding of the neumes.

The nineteenth century investigators such as Gardthausen, Pitra, Christ, and Paranikas generally agreed that the neumes were undecipherable. In the beginning of this century, J.-B. Thibaut and J.-B. Rebourt edited several treatises on Byzantine musical theory but were unable to decipher the notation. It was really due to the efforts of Fleischer, Wellesz, and Tillyard that the West saw its major breakthrough in the understanding of Byzantine notation.

Wellesz's phrase 'I found the key to the deciphering of Byzantine musical notation' is thus partly an expression of his own sense of triumph when he reached the answer to the baffling puzzle that confronted him; and partly represents the well-founded claim that the actual interpretation of the notation no longer offered any substantial obstacle after his (and Tillyard's) discovery. From then onwards it was the study of the music, no longer of the notation, that was to occupy musicologists, and the vast bibliography of the subject since that position was reached is abundant evidence of the strength of this claim. In spite of Fleischer's work, the line of notation had not yet been fully making sense. Now it did so; and this had been achieved by three years of lonely work in Vienna on such material as was then available—out of touch with others with whose results in normal conditions he would have been familiar much earlier.

The spirit of Vienna during the First World War must have been singularly different from that of London, as the writer, eighteen years younger than Wellesz, remembers it. In the days preceding the final catastrophe there was in Vienna a performance of Mahler's *Song of the Earth*, conducted by Oskar Fried. The greater part of the audience consisted of young officer cadets and soldiers who were on leave, or were soon to go to the Front. The work made such an impression that in the next fortnight it had to be repeated six times; and each performance was sold out.

Never were people spiritually more aware of, or more responsive to, greatness than in those years, and those that followed; leading to the end of the Monarchy, the collapse of our economy, inflation, destitution, hunger, lack of fuel, want of employment. Yet the will was there not to lose what former generations had created, and the passionate desire to enrich this invaluable possession by new achievements.

There is a photograph of Wellesz taken in 1925. It shows again

the handsome youthful face; but there is a new seriousness of purpose in it. Wellesz's own response to the war and its anxieties had been, first and foremost, hard work. During the last years of war, in addition to his work on the interpretation of the neumes, a whole series of articles on the music of the orient appeared, not simply of the Byzantine empire: Syrians, Copts, Abyssinians, Armenians—suggesting the focus of his research on the problem of origins. It was a singular piece of fortune for him that in the Armenian monastery in Vienna they could not afford to keep up polyphonic singing with Choir and Orchestra, and reverted to monodic plainsong, to which he had the chance of listening again and again.

With war ended, he began again to compose. He and his wife were living now in what was at that time still the country, on the outskirts of the Wienerwald, where life was not so difficult as it would have been in the city itself; though the children remember 'Papi' coming back from performances in Berlin 'with a suitcase full of money printed with ten million marks and even larger denominations. The next day the money was worth practically one loaf of bread.' One of their neighbours in the country was the novelist Jakob Wassermann, and in the summer of 1918 he read them the last chapter of a novel: an Indian legend, the theme symbolically linked with that of the main story. The legend tells of an exiled prince, offered the hand in marriage of a princess, after defeating her father's enemies for him. Vanity and ambition have led him to accept without seeing the bride. But why has she not been brought to the wedding feast? The prince confesses that he has sinned through ambition, and been punished by divine decree; and in despair he hands over the keys of the bride's chamber. But in the distance a voice is heard speaking of love and forbearance. The princess has been imprisoned in the tower since her birth; her extreme ugliness the punishment for an act of cruelty committed before her birth, by her father. Rejected by her bridegroom, she is haunted by demons. But Buddha the Enlightened One appears to her. She learns from him the virtue of sacrifice, and by complete renunciation attains sublime beauty. . . . When the story was over, Wassermann turned to Wellesz: 'Das wäre', he said, 'ein Opernstoff für dich'. So began the libretto of Wellesz's *Die Prinzessin Girmara*. It was followed by four others in the next decade, including one based on Hofmannsthal's version of *Alkestis*. The last was *Die Bakchantinnen* (1930), the theme of this

also suggested to him by Hofmannsthal, who had himself been pondering it for many years; and who saw the libretto, on which Wellesz worked for over a year, before he died. He encouraged Wellesz to go forward with the music. The score was completed on 15 November 1930, and the opera performed in the *Staatsoper* under the direction of Clemens Krauss, who had had some sixty rehearsals of the chorus and twenty of the orchestra. 'We are treating it', he said, 'as if it were the *Meistersinger*.' It was one of the composer's most ambitious works. He modified the framework of Euripides' play, so that the great scene of the Maenads on the mountain hunting Pentheus, in the Greek narrated by a messenger, is here directly represented on the stage. For Wellesz the opera was also a study in religious psychology. 'Gott mit uns' is the theme of the Bacchantes as Dionysus appears on the mountain; but the god's inspiration turns to madness until as in the Greek original, Agave (here the central figure of the drama) realizes that in her frenzy she has torn her own son to pieces. In 1932, when Oxford was celebrating the second centenary of Haydn's birth, honorary degrees were conferred on Wellesz and on two English friends and musicologist colleagues, Colles and Dent. In presenting him, the Public Orator spoke of his achievements in the study of Byzantine music, but the *Bakchantinnen* was evidently specially in his mind; and the Vice-Chancellor addressed Wellesz not as scholar, but as composer, DVX ET SIGNIFER HODIERNAE MUSICAE.

In 1934 he sketched out the first of five symphonic pieces, op. 53; they were inspired by *The Tempest*, and have been described as the climax of his achievement until then. The first performance under the direction of Bruno Walter was in February 1938. It was to be repeated in Amsterdam in March. The composer was invited to be there as guest of the Concertgebouw on 13 March. There was a further concert arranged for Rotterdam on 16 March. But while Wellesz was in Holland, on 13 March, Hitler moved into Vienna, and the world Wellesz loved so much was once again shattered.

During these years before his 'exile' began, his work with Tillyard on Byzantine music had been marked by a steady stream of articles. In the Bibliography in his own *Byzantine Music and Hymnography* there are some dozen belonging to the years 1921-36. Close co-operation with Tillyard had begun in 1927, and it led to the founding, in 1931, of the *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae*. Instrumental in bringing this about was

a conference financed by the Rask-Oersted Foundation and arranged in Copenhagen by Carsten Høeg. Publication was sponsored by the Royal Danish Academy, and was supported later with financial help by the British Academy; and it was under the patronage of the *Union Académique Internationale*. Høeg went to Greece to photograph manuscript material, there and in the near East; the first volume of the main *Monumenta* series was a facsimile of the Vienna *Sticherarium*, published jointly by the editors in 1935. In 1936 Wellesz's *Die Hymnen des Sticherarium für September* was published in the *Monumenta*; and though contact with Høeg was interrupted by the Second World War, the great undertaking of selection and publication of the vast amount of material available went steadily forward.

The success with which Wellesz remade his life following the devastating experience of his exile must be credited primarily to his own spiritual resources. It is of course true that he arrived in England at the moment when there was a violent revulsion in the feelings of those many who had long reckoned Germany to be the aggrieved party; a revulsion which meant that the results of the meeting with Hitler at Munich later that year were greeted with scorn, while the invasion of Czecho-Slovakia a year after the march into Vienna was, for opinion in England, the end of any hope of peace. Wellesz symbolized the victims of Fascism: a gentle intellectual and gifted musician who happened, though a devout Roman Catholic, to be of Jewish descent. But he had two qualities which set him apart from most other academic victims: the first that childlike simplicity which forms a large ingredient in the impression almost all his friends formed of him, a quality that Einstein is also reputed to have had; the second, certainly connected with the other, a charm which made him *persona grata* and much more than that, wherever he went. He won people's hearts: in his college at Oxford, in the Department of Music, in Washington when he made his visits to Dumbarton Oaks. So now a telegram was sent by Colles to him in Holland, inviting him to come to England forthwith. He was immediately elected to Honorary Membership of the Athenaeum, a rare distinction, and one which eased considerably the difficulties of the first months. Proposals came at once from London and Cambridge for lectures on the history of opera. His wife reached England four months later, and he was elected to a Fellowship at Lincoln College, Oxford, to begin in January 1939. But if the transition seemed to have been

made comparatively easily as well as gracefully, he was deeply affected by what had happened. His scholarship proved to be a readily exportable asset. His work as a composer could not be torn away so easily from its roots. Even in these days of the worldwide exchange of broadcast programmes, the work of contemporary composers does not cross national barriers so easily, though things have changed so greatly since 1939. And so, as in 1914, his writing of music came again to an abrupt stop, and he worked with furious energy at his musicological, and particularly his Byzantine, research. He was eventually given a Readership *ad hominem* in Byzantine music, as Oxford became, solely because of his presence there, a centre for its study. In 1941, Sisam, of the Clarendon Press, suggested to him the writing of a book on Byzantine hymnography. It appeared in 1949, and then in a second edition (twice since reprinted) with a new section on Melismatic Chant and Psalmody, in 1961.

Tillyard had observed with remarkable percipience in an article written in 1916 that 'Byzantine music in its prime was no barbaric or semi-oriental mystery, but an art whose simplicity and devotional character proclaim it akin to the best Gregorian traditions of the West.' What Wellesz showed was that this relationship was due to a common origin. He had been able in 1945 to produce a convincing transcription of the fragment of an early Christian hymn to the Trinity, found at Oxyrhynchus ('The Earliest Example of a Christian Hymn', *Classical Quarterly*, xxxix, 1945); showing that earlier attempts to make the rhythm of the music fit the anapaestic form in which the words were written had given a distorted view of its character. This fragment, of the late third century, takes the history of such hymns back to a period far earlier than that of the earliest codices containing Byzantine music—earlier actually than Constantine's foundation of the new capital. He showed that the Christian churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria provided not only the models on which the poetic forms of Byzantine hymns were based, but that the oldest versions of both Byzantine and Gregorian melodies go back to a common source, the music of the churches of Antioch and Jerusalem, which in their turn derived from the music of the Jews. *Eastern Elements in Western Chant*, published in the American series of the *Monumenta* in 1947, is in fact a group of articles on various phases of Byzantine and Gregorian music and their inter-connection; including those groups which held such a prominent place in the divine service that they kept even in western copies the

original form with Greek text; appearing in both languages—like the *Ote to Stavro* or in its Latin translation *O quando in cruce*, of the Beneventan rite. These articles represent work in progress while he was reaching his conclusions; rather than a statement written after they had been reached, surveying them from that standpoint. This is no doubt his reason for suggesting later, in the second edition of *Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, the need for a revised version of *Eastern Elements in Western Chant*. His edition of the text and music of the *Akathistos* hymn of thanksgiving to the Virgin, both text and music confidently attributed by him (with the exception of one stanza inserted later) to the great hymnographer Romanos, was printed in Copenhagen in 1957.

The treatment of musical history in Oxford had been sketchy compared with that in Vienna, and this offered him new opportunities. He threw himself increasingly into the work of the Oxford Department. An undergraduate school had just been established when Sir Jack Westrup became Heather Professor; a scholar who shared many of his interests and his outlook and who but for his untimely death would have written this memoir. For the *New Oxford History of Music* Westrup and he, with Abraham, Dent, and Dom Anselm Hughes, were editors. He was himself responsible for the Byzantine part of the early medieval volume and, with Dr. Frederick Sternfeld, for contributions on the 'Early Symphony' and 'The Concerto' in Volume vii (1745–1790). When these latter were written, he was eighty-five, and though he was content to leave the actual drafting to his colleague, he was still able to take a leading part in the discussions which the final draft embodied. It had been all his life one of the fields in which he was particularly interested, and he still moved in it with complete confidence.

He played a full part, likewise, right up to his last illness, in the life of Lincoln College, where during the war he had been able to establish subscription concerts in the college hall, which helped to ensure that performance as well as study continued during those times of exceptional difficulty. The programmes ranged from thirteenth-century music to the first performance in England of Hindemith's *Ludus Tonalis*; and it was of course due to Wellesz's distinction that a series of remarkable artists gave their services for fees which, as the Junior Treasurer of the time confesses, even then made him blush. He called the College his second home, and up to the time of his last illness used to come in regularly, every Sunday night—when as often as not

it fell to him to preside in Common Room; which he did with manifest enjoyment. He had come to be an outstanding teacher. 'The quality of Egon's teaching we most prized' writes one of his pupils, Dr. Patricia Howard,

was his authority. Egon felt himself to be in direct contact, not only with the Second Viennese School, but with whole centuries of European music. He taught as if he were handing down a precious secret by a kind of apostolic succession. It was not so much 'Schubert did this because . . .' but rather 'I alone know why Schubert did this'. He communicated an omniscience which neither then nor since had I any cause to suspect. His highest compliment was 'What you say is absolutely right—of course'. There was never any question that we might actually contribute to his knowledge.

I clearly remember his greeting when I went to tell him of my degree. 'Now we are colleagues'. I cannot convey the generosity of his encouragement. He supervised my first two books chapter by chapter, taking enormous pains to get me introductions to Libraries or private individuals who might help me, taking me through each stage of research almost as if he were still setting weekly essays. . . . Perhaps more than anything else, Egon taught me how to teach. To be the kind of person at whose feet people willingly sit, because of the complete authority of their knowledge: I can at least recognize the quality, occasionally, in others. I think his dual role as composer and scholar contributed enormously to this. We were discussing the problems of Admetus, and Egon typically not only knew exactly what Calzabigi intended but was able to point out how his opera realized Calzabigi's idea more perfectly than Gluck's . . . but he could prove such preposterous assertions with the scores.

But while Oxford was his second home, the end of the war made it possible for him again to visit Vienna. He went in 1948 for a performance of his First Symphony, op. 62, conducted by Josef Krips; it had been first played the year before, by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Ideas for this symphony had come to him on a visit to the English lakes, in the summer of 1945, and he had completed it by the end of that year. The Octet, op. 67, was written at the request of the Vienna Octet players, and they performed it in 1949. The twenty years following were a time of international triumph both for scholar and composer. He composed eight more symphonies, the ninth finished just before the onset of his last illness. In 1951 a charming opera, *Incognita*, the libretto by Elizabeth Mackenzie, was produced in Oxford under Sir Jack Westrup's direction. It was in a different vein from most of his work with a late Romantic, Richard Straussian flavour. And in 1966, greatly to his

satisfaction, his pupil and friend M. Velimirović undertook the editorship of a new journal, *Studies in Eastern Chant*; and so was provided a new forum for the discussion of those musicological topics that had been among the main interests of his life. He was made C.B.E. in 1957, and in June of that same year awarded the Silver Medal of the City of Paris. Early in 1958 the Gold Medal of the City of Vienna was presented to him at the Austrian Embassy in London; in 1961 it was the Knight Commander's Cross of the Order of Gregory the Great, in Rome. So it went on; and with it—in part stimulated by it, for though he had no trace of vanity, this widespread recognition gave him almost as much pleasure as it did to his friends—continued the steady flow of composition and of learned articles. His interest in religious experience had already deeply influenced several of his operas. Now that interest became explicit. This had indeed started before his exile with op. 57, the Mass in F minor. Op. 58 was the *Kleine Messe* in C. In 1944 he set the Hopkins poem, the *Leaden and the Golden Echo* as a cantata, a characteristic choice. Two other Masses followed, the *Kleine Messe* in G, op. 80, and the *Missa Brevis*, op. 89.

'As a composer', writes his friend Robert Layton,

he was by no means predictable, and his musical language though showing the impact of his special relationship with Schönberg, was independent. He never set great store by pure harmonic effect: 'Novelty in harmonic writing' he said, 'is in music the most dangerous thing since it fades so soon, whereas part-writing remains durable.'¹ His melodic style throughout his mature career is characterized by wide leaps and angular contours but whether in *Prosperos Beschwörung* or in the symphonies and string quartets of his later years, there remains a consistency of utterance. If in the first decade or so of his creative career, he concentrated on instrumental music, and in the second, on the series of works for the stage including his noble operas, *Alkestis* and *Der Opferung des Gefangen*, his last years concentrated on the symphony. As far as the operas are concerned, Wilfred Mellers has put it: 'Wellesz resembles Berg and Schönberg in attempting to externalize nervous sensation in the presentation of a human drama on stage; but whereas they try to achieve a balanced and satisfying structure through the use of a musical formalism such as the twelve-note technique, Wellesz revives the musico-theatrical stylization of baroque opera, with its chorus, dance-pantomime and coloratura song.' Probably the most powerful of all his dramatic works is the opera, *Alkestis*, where the invention is finely sustained and the choral writing in particular has a finely controlled eloquence.

¹ In a broadcast on the Third Programme.

The nine symphonies embrace the last two and a half decades of his life. No. 1 was first performed by the Berlin Philharmonic under Sergiu Celibidache and is frankly tonal, as is its immediate successor, No. 2 in E flat (1948) which Sir Adrian Boult championed for some time. The symphonies that follow show him using the discoveries of the twelve-note system in the light of intuitive response rather than as a result of doctrinal schematic promptings. The years immediately following the war saw a lower norm of dissonance than had been the case of his pre-war works; his sixth and last opera, *Incognita* (1952) evinces great generosity of feeling and a keen musical resource. His best-known piece from this period is the octet commissioned by the Vienna Octet for performance together with Schubert's essay in the medium. In some of his bigger works, some may feel a certain want of rhythmic breadth which inhibits the melodic line from really taking wing, but in his finest pieces among which the eloquently wrought Third Symphony should be numbered, there is a nobility that recalls the art of Bruckner whom he so much revered. It is on the symphonies of his last years that he would wish to be judged. They have as yet a peripheral hold on the repertory both in this country and abroad, but the finest of them continue the Viennese tradition honorably, and his operas, *Alkestis* and *Die Bakchantinnen* will surprise those who take the trouble to explore them by the breadth and power of their vision.

A fall, followed or perhaps occasioned by a stroke, left him virtually bedridden for the last years of his life. He found speaking difficult, though that exquisite politeness continued to shine through his disability; and it was clear that that part of his mind concerned not with speech but with music was almost as active as before, so that he was still able to enjoy occasional concerts in the Sheldonian Theatre, still able to rehearse those due to perform his work on the radio, still able, thanks to the marvellous devotion of his wife, to pay a last visit to Vienna.

'Handing down a precious secret.' This was a quality in his teaching, and in his conversation, which his colleagues as well as his pupils used particularly to enjoy; and it was more than a mannerism. He was a modern Gnostic, for whom learning was not only esoteric but also a sort of approach to deeper experience which he loved to share; subtly indicating, as he did so, that the sharing of the mystery was an immense privilege offered to those not yet initiated into it. Though the industry expended in acquiring the techniques needed for his studies (he was for instance a distinguished palaeographer) was enormous, his discoveries were perhaps, most often, leaps of the imagination; the ideas tested and substantiated later by a

painstaking elaborate re-examination of the material. It is arguable for instance that his original contacts with Strzygowski made the first leap possible: the hypothesis that, as Strzygowski had proclaimed for the visual arts, so it might be true of music, that the secret of origins was to be sought not in Rome, but in the East.

The train of thought was not always clear to those who had not encountered him before. The story is told—*ben trovato*, perhaps, rather than true—that in a college admissions interview he would sometimes say to the candidate ‘Beethoven, yes, no; Schönberg, yes, no’—leaving the precise content of the question less than certain. But the precise content did not matter. At such a moment, the interviewee often first realized himself to be in actual contact with a great musical past. And to suppose that other-wordliness prevented Wellesz having a shrewd idea of what was happening among ordinary mortals would be a complete misunderstanding of him. ‘It is so’ he would begin, positively and with great emphasis. There would follow the aposiopesis, of which figure he was a master; and then ‘it is absolutely not so that the Professor should himself spend time with a paste pot in the library’. As this was not simply because his young days had given him a different idea of the professoriate from what he found in Oxford; but was sound common sense, followed up by a series of well-aimed thrusts at anyone who might be able to support the claims of a department, parsimoniously staffed, for another secretary. He was a scholar of rare distinction, who launched a new science; but perhaps he will be best remembered as the most representative, in many ways, of the Second Viennese School; whose contacts with others in it were widest; who besides being part of it himself, was its observer and chronicler. To this persistent theme he returned again and again; starting with his paper, read in Rome in 1911, *Das Musikleben in Österreich*; followed by *Wien als Musikstadt* in 1921; on through a whole series concerned with Schönberg, from the book on him, published in 1921, to *Schönberg, An Appreciative Monograph*, in 1945; and to articles on Mahler’s symphonies which appeared in 1940 and 1961. The theme is thus an obsession, a lover’s obsession, throughout his life. And as it developed, its documentation grew in the rich archive of letters, which together with his own manuscripts are now in the room dedicated to his memory in the National Library in Vienna.

I have to acknowledge with great gratitude help received from Mrs. Wellesz, who allowed me to use the autobiographical fragment left by Wellesz himself; and from many of his friends, colleagues, and pupils: in particular from Professor Dimitri Conomos, Professor Dimitrye Stefanovic, Dr. Patricia Howard, Robert Layton, Dr. A. Rosenthal, and Dr. F. Sternfeld. I have also often referred to *Egon Wellesz, eine Studie von Robert Schollum* (Vienna, 1963), no. 2 in the series *Österreichische Komponisten des XX. Jahrhunderts*, for details of his musical career.

WALTER OAKESHOTT