

Atonale Musik (1922)
Josef Matthias Hauer

[This translation is a work-in-progress – Jamie Crofts 2011]

Instructions/Explanation

Atonal music can only be performed properly on atonal instruments and with the human voice. Atonal instruments are **well-tempered**¹ (equal temperament): Piano, harmonium, organ, celesta etc. The other instruments (violins, flutes, oboes, clarinets, horns, trumpets etc) are **tonal**, i.e. with keys and fingerboards, and limited by the fundamental and its overtones. Atonal music comes out of the **Melos der Intervalle**². (?An interval is easier and better the closer related the sounds of which it is made up.?) This peak of intonation is achieved with a **good** piano. In the tonal instruments the *Melos der Intervalle* is clouded by the **various** sounds and overtones of each note. To work out a purely atonal Melos you must always ensure that **all twelve** equal tempered **notes** are played. This (?Hörgesetz?) (this “Nomos”) makes a musical **language** which is comprehensible to every person on earth. [Atonal music is the multiplicity of the arrangement of the twelve notes which has 479,001,600 melodic possibilities and unlimited possibilities in terms of rhythm and harmony]. Atonal music is first and foremost, **monodic**. From the Melos comes forth the rhythm, the accentuation. From the rhythm of the atonal melody comes forth the harmony, the polyphony, through the sustaining (the leaving behind) of individual notes of the melody. Atonal music knows no stereotypical ruts, but rather must be taken from the tying over of the “prosaic language”. You then move forward with the accentuation as with metrical feet in speech, depending on the meaning and significance of the “word”. Even with f. p. cresc., andante etc. the statement can be so called because the expression changes from phrase to phrase. An inexact (approximate) description would be half the job and could only lead to errors, but an exact notation would only overload the notation. It must therefore be a matter of honour for the musician to interpret the Melos correctly. Our tonal notation is not the right scoring for the atonal Melos. It is only a stopgap measure. The sharps and flats mean nothing musically, because the difference between G# and Ab. between D# and Eb etc. does not exist in atonal music (on an atonal instrument). Purely technically, practically, depending on the movement, G, G#, A or A, Ab, G, a sharp or a flat is placed before the notes of the black keys. The notes for the white keys always remain unmarked.³ **The accidentals are always only for the notes they precede (even within barlines).** Naturals are only written in very specific circumstances. With ligatures (slurs, ties) of course the first note is definitive, the second (third...) note is sustained and not struck again.

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¹ This is a reference to Bach’s 48 Preludes and Fugues. Hauer needs to clarify this here since Bach’s Well Tempered keyboard was not the same as a 20th Century Equal Tempered keyboard.

² Hauer appropriates the word Melos to refer to his sequence of 12 pitches. The word is related to the idea of melody, but unlike melody the sequence might include pitches which are sounded simultaneously and, in terms of post-tonal theory, suggests an unordered set.

³ This is a significant statement as Schoenberg, Berg, Webern and others adopted the convention of adding an accidental to all notes including naturals.