

**Expanding a redundancy:
Manipulating row forms through augmentation
in Webern's *Symphony Op.21***

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In *Symphony Op. 21*, Webern constructs intricate, detailed, and crystalline structures using the inherent features of the tone row. Beyond the row being combinatorial, the ordering of intervals which assembles the row create opportunities for intense symmetrical variation, hence the form is theme and variation. In wading through layers upon layers one finds that Webern creates the proverbial onion in which each deeper layer is more interesting and rigorously structured than the previous. Such is the case with the variations. In a direct comparison of the theme with variation IV (henceforth V.4) comes augmentation of identical structure through row expansion.

The tone row used by Webern is inversionally combinatorial which limits how many available permutations exist. Instead of the typical forty-eight there are half as many, twenty-four. This is significant as the retrograde versions can be eliminated because simply transposing the prime or inverted row a tritone reveals its retrograde. See example 1.

Example 1: Prime and inversion permutations have same retrograde row form which when applied to matrix produces 24 permutations.



There are two opposing views on why or why not to include designations of the retrograde row form. First, is to keep the retrograde as an analytical tool because there are many palindromes and symmetrical structures which are easier to see when labeling a row as its prime and retrograde versions. Many times in this piece occurs a prime form followed by its retrograde. Using this method makes it more apparent on the surface to what is going on.

Second, it is redundant to use retrograde forms when there are perfectly good prime and inversion forms lying about. Viewing retrograde forms in this manner actually brings out more of the processes in this piece as well as the genius of Webern. It would be easy to simply write a row form followed by a retrograde version of itself, but to be able to weave intricate fabrics through the inherent symmetrical properties of the row requires more rigor from the composer and a more structured technique of composition, both compositional characteristics of Webern.

The row is symmetrical due to the interval order being reflected around an axis between order numbers six and seven. Either moving from the axis or the outside in reveals the same interval structure. See example 2.

Example 2: Symmetrical intervals in tone row. Going from the axis out or the outside in produces the same interval order.



