Densely informative and richly detailed, Jack Boss’s monograph on Schoenberg’s twelve–tone music is the product of an impressive thirteen years of analytical work, itself drawing on a career–spanning engagement with Schoenberg’s music. This volume is the latest offering in Cambridge University Press’s *Music since 1900* series, which also published *Schoenberg’s Musical Imagination* by Michael Cherlin, one of Boss’s primary interlocutors. Cherlin, however, is in no way the only thinker whose work the author builds upon and Jack Boss truly offers an item of value on behalf of all students of Schoenberg’s music; the book synthesizes and indexes a tremendous volume of prominent thought on all aspects of Schoenberg’s output. Those wishing to develop some familiarity with the discursive history of twelve–tone analysis and Schoenberg scholarship will be rewarded by the meticulous footnoting through the book. Building on and maintaining dialogue with such a substantial literature, Boss motivates his own project from a unique career specialty of his, and the text is by no means derivative. Though the long analytical narratives told between the covers of this book often deal in careful note–for–note analysis, they are chiefly motivated by Boss’s long–standing interest in describing the processes that unfold across *entire* pieces and their forms, developmental narratives by which the pieces can be understood as dynamic unities.

In his first chapter, serving as a preface of sorts to the volume, Boss refers to the signature processes through which pieces work themselves out as *musical ideas*. By *musical idea*, he means a sort of dialectical trajectory that shapes a piece from beginning to end: one that realizes or otherwise grapples with the nascent potentials and conflicts of a piece’s initial *Grundgestalt*, often involving the linear clarification of its characteristic row forms and developing use of characteristic row partitions as musical conflicts are suggested, elaborated and resolved. Boss’s analyses typically demonstrate how certain ideal–states—usually characterized by some sort of symmetry of pitch or interval sequences—are suggested but obscured at a piece’s outset (thesis), how these symmetrical states struggle to be realized against certain musical conflicts (antithesis), and how they finally emerge unobstructed by the piece’s end (synthesis). Alternately, as in his analysis of *Moses und Aron*, a highly symmetrical state is pronounced
as an initial condition, and the piece’s narrative will coalesce around the loss of this ideality and the inability to secure it once again. To put things more succinctly, a piece’s musical idea encompasses the thematic musical problem of a piece, the attempts made to deal with it, and the solution(s) that diffuse the piece’s central problematic.

Boss sketches the intellectual history antecedent to Schoenberg’s musical idea, pointing to rhetorical and oratorical devices in Forkel, Mattheson, and Koch. He connects his project to the eighteenth–century investment in locating musical unity and coherence in the elaboration of a primary idea by subsequent ones. The dynamic states of conflict elicited by a piece’s Hauptsatz or initial conditions are thus likened to rhetorical refutatio, the process of working through the tensions and contradictions of said material (12). Boss then reviews the philosophical history preceding Schoenberg’s conception of musical idea. He notes the later biological organicism native to certain strains of nineteenth–century German idealism in connection with the dialectical model of development by which the musical idea might be seen to take shape. He gives particular attention to Schopenhauer as well, the writings of whom Schoenberg was known to stock his library with. Relating his project to Schopenhauer’s World as Will and Representation and its Platonist resonances allows him to further clarify his notion of musical idea as being borne not just out of potentials within a piece’s Grundgestalt, locating musical conflict instead in the asymmetries between the (Platonic) idealities suggested by a Grundgestalt and the real–time, imperfect manifestations of these idealities by which the piece struggles to clarify itself. Boss concludes with a quick survey of more recent thinkers such as Patricia Carpenter, Murray Dineen and Severine Neff who have motivated analytical projects of their own from the identification of thematic musical problems in pieces and how they are worked out (29, note 67).

Chapter 2 explores the op. 25 Suite for Piano and positions the suite as a turning point in Schoenberg’s oeuvre in which we may observe twelve–tone technique coming into being for the first time. Boss notes that previous authors have disagreed as to the twelve–tone construction of the suite as a whole, and takes the stance that its principles of construction throughout can in fact be related to twelve–tone technique. He argues that the suite presents a spectrum of row treatments, ranging from a more unordered presentation on one end, to a strict linear ordering on the other end. Because these analyses differ in technique from canonical twelve–tone technique, this may in fact be a less–than–ideal chapter to begin one’s explorations in. For example, in the Prelude analysis, “prime” and “retrograde” will be used to refer not to a row and its presentation in
reverse order, but instead will refer to reversing the order of pitch–classes within tetrachords, the order of which will not differ between “prime” and “retrograde” forms. However, once these amendments are considered, Boss introduces analytical procedures that will recur across the book. He structures this analysis around particular partitions, or segmentations, of rows, showing palindromic structures within them. This palindromic structure, the piece’s musical ideal as analyzed, is projected, lost and then recovered, in what will become a common script throughout the book.

Next, Boss turns to the Menuet movement. In this analysis, he challenges the notion that there is a strict dividing line within the suite, cordoning off only the Gigue and Trio as proper exemplars of twelve–tone ordering. In dialogue with previous analysts, he keeps an eye toward possible tonal references, but keeps this element of the analysis subsidiary as he will do throughout the book, a maneuver with which I agree. In the Gigue, Boss makes a map of the overall form, a helpful device he will continue to use, showing the overall binary construction of this movement. This analysis hinges on a gambit Boss will return to: showing how elements foreign to an opening state become assimilated to it as the narrative arc of the musical idea follows through. This analysis also has the benefit of returning to more traditional formulations of twelve–tone procedures and structures, unlike the analyses of the other movements in this chapter.

Chapter 3 examines the third movement of the op. 26 Woodwind Quintet, a piece that Ethan Haimo and Jan Maegaard previously identified as the first piece to possess the basic principles of Schoenberg’s mature twelve–tone music (see Haimo 1990, 106–23; and Maegaard 1962, 109–115). This is one of the many moments throughout the book in which Boss’s expert knowledge of his discursive terrain allows him to differentiate himself from his interlocutors by suggesting places to look for alternate points of view, and such features make the book a strong research aid. This piece and its analysis introduce overt reference to classical forms, a device that will play a role in multiple chapters. The author suggests that this piece considers sonata and rondo structures and reanimates them by way of principles of dodecaphonic composition. Boss begins with an uncharacteristically aphoristic sketch of the first movement before moving on to the third in order to thematize the idea of a musical problem involving conflict between the intervals created by adjacent and non–adjacent pitch–classes of row forms. He analyzes the third movement’s form as ABA’+Coda, and begins the analysis with a demonstration of the Grundgestalt: three statements of P, each partitioned differently such that the horn plays out an alternate row. Inverted row forms then carry out the same procedure as the A section (mm. 1–34) goes on. The B section (mm. 34–81) then pres-
ents new rows and new partitions, creating the central musical problem of the movement: relating A section and B section material to one another. Midway through the B section, a rotation of $R_9$ is given the triplex presentation with which the movement opened on $P_3$, partitioned again so as to bring out an alternate row in the flute, which thus reprises the horn’s alternate row in the opening. One process that brings this piece together, then, is the way this material in the flute reprises the tetrachords highlighted in the earlier horn material, thereby linking the B section row material to the P3 home row. This allows a smooth transition back to the A’ section (mm. 82–113). Another strategy Schoenberg takes advantage of is known as an anti–combinatorial relationship: when the hexachords of two row forms share all pitch–class content instead of exhausting a twelve–tone aggregate. Here, an anti–combinatoriality allows a transition from a rotation of $RI_2$ to $R_3$ in mm. 76–81. The appearance of $R_3$ then motivates a return to the home row, $P_3$. The coda (mm. 114–141) trades in a play of palindromic structures that merge partitioning strategies of both the A and B sections, cementing the reconciliation necessary to complete a musical idea. Boss finishes the chapter with a historical claim: that the anti–combinatorial relationships act as a precursor in Schoenberg’s compositional development to his signature technique of hexachordal inversional combinatoriality.

Chapter 4 then presents an analysis of the third of the Three Satires, op. 28, “Der neue Klassizismus,” in which mature hexachordal inversional combinatoriality truly comes to the compositional fore for the first time. To address this point, Boss explores features of “Mond und Menschen” of the op. 27 no. 3 Vier Stücke, and the Overture of the op. 29 Suite in which certain row forms are lacking their combinatorial partners. When he turns finally to “Der neue Klassizismus,” Boss then shows how this piece takes up reduced harmonic resources: just two simultaneous row forms are presented at a time in a combinatorial relationship. He also discusses the fascinating historical context behind the opus as a whole, interpreting the set as a statement of Schoenberg’s understanding of his place relative to recent compositional history. In this reading, the first Satire represents a tentative gaze towards atonality, the second mounts a smirking critique of Stravinsky, who Schoenberg dismissively calls “der kleine Modernsky” in the Satire text, and the third, finally, represents “the right way” to treat neo–Baroquism in contradistinction to Stravinsky in the composer’s opinion. Boss adopts a creative take on this piece, interpreting its form as resembling a gallery of baroque forms: a Baroque concerto form (mm. 1–57), followed by a motet (mm. 58–86) and a double–exposition (mm. 87–end). The narrative that guides the musical idea of this analysis is that an ideal shape is proposed, in this case the combinatorial pairing of $P_0$. 
and I₅, obscured for instance by resemblances of those rows to retrograde inversion forms, and then recovered in its ideality by the piece’s end. Boss also traces numerous processes by which hexachord identities are obscured by presenting them vertically, thus, prime and retrograde–inversional forms become impossible to definitively tell apart. He binds his analysis under a long–range narrative arc corresponding to the Satire’s text. In the concerto section, the text speaks of how “the power of the times cannot touch the composer who follows the rules,” while the motet section then coalesces around the chorus’ statement that “It [technique] will lead to an inspiration in time,” and the fugue closes around the text’s mention of a “classical perfection” (241). Boss neatly asserts that all four of P₀, I₅, R₀, and RI₀ enter into combinatorial relationships towards the end of the fugue with palindromic patterns to boot. His hermeneutic wrap–up to the chapter claims this piece not as an extended exercise in mocking Stravinsky as in the second Satire, but as a demonstration of Schoenberg’s ability to take classical forms into the twentieth century himself. Nonetheless, the author’s interpretation suggests a number of pointed jabs at Stravinsky, and the reading of this compositional subtext forms an interesting thread to follow through the chapter.

Chapter 5, the shortest of Boss’s analytical chapters, and perhaps the most forgiving to readers less well–versed in twelve–tone analysis, surveys the op. 33a Klavierstück. Unlike most of the other pieces treated in the book, op. 33a largely avoids the use of characteristic row partitions and it avoids highlighting invariant pitch–collections. Accordingly, Boss’s analysis zeroes in on the only Schoenbergian signature technique that this piece trades in: the use of inversionally combinatorial row pairings. The relative simplicity of the harmonic resources deployed in this piece and its analysis make this chapter a friendly alternate point of entry to the book’s chronological presentation of the pieces assayed within it. Following George Perle, Boss gives the piece a modified sonata–allegro treatment with a sharply curtailed development and recapitulation (see Perle 1991, 113). The author begins the analysis with the intensely symmetrical, palindromic “ideal” of the six opening tetrachords drawn from inversionally combinatorial P and I row forms. This palindromic symmetry of the opening chords immediately suggests a narrative arc for a musical idea: the verticalities obscure the linear form of the row, which will need to be clarified, and the extremely high degree of naked symmetry here will necessarily become a fragile state, one that will be lost, one that the piece will seek to recover over the course of the piece. Variations of this tetrachordal scheme progressively obscure this palindromic ideal throughout the exposition, mm. 1–13. An especially effective figure, Example 5.4, performatively demonstrates
through the convolution of its visual presentation that the once starkly obvious tetrachordal partitioning of row pairs comes under considerable strain. Departing from typical sonata allegro forms, Boss does not identify a transitional theme, though I believe mm. 10–13 would have made for a convincing primary theme–based transition. Eschewing this option, his analysis instead moves straight onto the second theme (mm. 14–18), with its characteristically (for sonata analysis) more placid rhetoric.

Another interesting feature of this chapter occurs in Boss’s discussion of the closing theme (mm. 19–23), in which he analyzes Schoenberg’s earlier sketches for the piece and offers his speculations regarding the changes Schoenberg made to this section of the form. At the end of the closing theme, an apparently errant A natural appears, where the row count would predict an A flat. With characteristic scrupulousness, Boss documents the discursive history of this seemingly “wrong” note, siding in favor of the A natural, which is followed by a melodic leap up to a high D and a drop to the E below. The piece thus transitions smoothly into a sound world dominated by the highly symmetrical stacked perfect fifths that follow. I found myself cheering for the author here: any pianist who plays this piece knows how powerfully striking the quintal/quartal texture and its symmetries are, prior to any understanding of its constitutive row forms or combinatorial schemes. That Boss decided in favor of justifying the “wrong note” on the basis of such a musically intuitive set of symmetries made this one of the most satisfying passages of the entire book for this reader. A discussion of the development follows, moving through a number of inversionally combinatorial row pairs, both recalling the intervallic dispositions of the opening chords and exploring new ones. The recapitulation at m. 32 opts for a straightforward “tonic” presentation of the row pairs that structured the piece’s opening. For the first time, a linear presentation of row forms appears, thereby achieving one of the typical expressions of Boss’s musical idea: clarifying the piece’s row ordering. A very brief presentation of the second theme omits some of the palindromic properties of the exposition–al second theme before a brief coda that fragments symmetrical objects found elsewhere in the piece.

Boss crafts Chapter 6 as another overtly sonata–formal analysis, growing out of the tritone–related \{D, C sharp, A\} and \{G, A flat, C\} trichords of the Fourth String Quartet’s (op. 37) first movement. These dyads serve as head–motifs for two inversionally combinatorial row forms, \(P_2\) and \(I_7\). The musical problem that motivates the analysis lies in the question of whether the trichords could be brought out in the same row form. Throughout this analysis, Boss demonstrates row partitions that will serve to typify each sonata–formal area. He also provides here, and in a number of other chapters,
a formal road–map at its outset, a helpful preface to the much more intricate analysis that will follow. The primary theme area (mm. 1–26) trades in the interplay of \( P_2 \) and \( I_7 \), after which a lengthy transition area divided into two sub–areas follows (mm. 27–65). As always, Boss remains in rigorous dialogue with his music–theoretical predecessors, making a nod to a tradition of considering tonal references associated with \( P_2 \) and \( I_7 \) row forms, here D minor and B–flat major, respectively. As in a number of analyses in the book, Boss will keep his finger on the development of such tonal references, though they decidedly take a backseat. After a second theme (mm. 66–94) and a rhetorically cadential resting point, a five–stage development follows (mm. 95–164). Here, the author introduces a hexachordal partition, consisting of 6–Z6 and 6–Z38 that will ultimately lead to the solution to the musical problem as initially laid out. In the abridged recapitulation, the primary theme area (mm. 165–177) reintroduces the musical problem, solving it in the secondary theme area (mm. 188–195) with a partition of \( P_6 \) that incorporates a 6–Z6 hexachord \{C sharp, D, A, G, A flat, C\} such that the opposed trichords of the movement’s opening are brought out together within a single row form. This completes the narrative arc of a musical idea and the analysis treats the lion’s share of rest of the form as a coda (mm. 239–284) that alludes to both the primary and secondary theme areas.

Given Boss’s overarching interest in entire pieces and their formal structures, the fact that Boss does not engage with the New *Formenlehre* strikes me as something of a missed opportunity. Welcome would have been some reflection on the potential and problematics of extending the recent efflorescence of thought on form to Boss’s chosen repertoire, especially given the sonata–formal overtures within Chapters 3, 5 and 6. Unfortunately, no attempt is made to grapple with Caplin’s or Hepokoski and Darcy’s (or others’) approaches to form and phrase structure and thus no attempt is made to relate Schoenberg’s sonata–formal (or sonata–redolent) procedures to any of the newer concepts that would be familiar to those who have kept up to speed with our field’s form–theoretical energies of late. This is not to diminish these analyses; they certainly speak on their own terms, but this reviewer was left with unsated curiosities as to the viability of considering the prospects of Sonata Theory or Caplinian Form Functional Theory for addressing dodecaphony.¹

Another of the highlights of the volume is Boss’s chapter on Schoenberg’s unfinished opera *Moses und Aron*, a piece the composer struggled to finish until his death. More than any other chapter, it addresses the piece’s *failure* to resolve musical and dramaturgical problems, it presents the incompleteness of a musical idea. Boss’s narrative of the two completed acts of the opera revolves around Moses’ failure to understand God’s perfection fully.
Current Musicology

and his inability to verbally transmit God’s will to the Israelites. Chapter 7 trades in what is by now a familiar script: a row partition with highly symmetrical properties, representing the fathomless perfection of God (and fittingly called the “Depths of God” partition), is presented at the outset of the piece as an ideal state, which comes into conflict with less symmetrical row partitions. Here, however, the other row partitions fail to reconcile themselves to the symmetries of God’s partition. Boss proposes that this inability to resolve the piece’s twelve-tone conflicts is the only appropriate ending for the opera, which ultimately tells the story of Moses’ frustration with his Godly commission to lead the Israelites. Any attempt to conclude the opera otherwise, in a vindication of Moses, would result in the dramaturgical inanity of a tritely optimistic, tacked on resolution. Thus, Boss’s reading continues to reinforce the perfection paradigm (if only partially) insofar as it maintains that an attempt to further unify the musical and dramatic elements of the opera (as Schoenberg seemed to have in mind for Act III) would in fact diminish the piece, imperfectioning it.

Half of the chapter is devoted to a tour (of sorts) of what Boss refers to as the leitmotivic row partitions of the opera. Part of what makes this chapter satisfying is the extent to which the author taps into a hermeneutical register of prose, engaging convincingly with structural properties of the partitions he identifies and their dramatic associations. For instance, the “Depths of God” partition (also identified by Boss’ chief interlocutors, Lewin and Cherlin) possesses two outer trichords that flank an inner hexachord that is symmetrical to itself under retrograde inversion, thus thematizing God’s complex, multiple perfection through the partition itself (a hexachord in between two trichords) as well as the RI-symmetry of the inner hexachord. A partition Boss calls “Moses’ Understanding of God,” which simply divides the row into its component tetrachords in sequential order appears with prime and retrograde–inversional forms combined with one another in the orchestral texture such that the English horn melody plays out the God partition’s inner hexachord, signifying Moses’ limited but unparalleled understanding of God. Boss finds that what he calls the “Magic of the Image” partition appears in Act I as God begins to reveal to Moses the miracles he will perform through Moses. Later, however, in Act II Scene 3 this partition is used to portray the deceit the Golden Calf enacts on the Israelites when a number of prime and retrograde–inversional forms create chromatic segments, which are associated with the idol. In this dense texture it becomes difficult to tell what row any chromatic tetrachord comes from, signifying the Israelites’ deception by their false idol. The incomplete descriptions necessary here can hardly do justice to the sophisticated analytical claims the author makes by means of
his observations on row partitioning. If the interpretive treatments Boss offers are conservative, they are nonetheless a welcome contrast to the more hermeneutically reticent treatments of absolute music that the other chapters undertake (with the exception of Chapter 3’s analysis of the Three Satires, op. 28). My only significant concern regarding Boss’ otherwise illuminating, stimulating survey of the opera’s leitmotivic partitions is its oddly non–chronological presentation of them. Instead, Boss appears to organize this presentation thematically, beginning with the partitions that are closest to God’s perfect symmetries and concluding with those that signify the Israelites’ lapse into sin and idolatry. However, I found myself wishing the chapter’s presentation had helped me gain some purchase on the narrative development of the completed acts, and Boss’ concern for the long plot arcs of pieces curiously takes a back seat in this chapter.

Boss’ final chapter covers one of Schoenberg’s last works, the String Trio op. 45. As he notes, the piece is typically described in terms of its jagged, fragmentary textures, its apparent discontinuity. Thus, there is a sense in which he cuts against the grain of received wisdom concerning this piece in that he seeks to understand the work in terms of the book’s overarching program of discerning unity and cohesive musical ideas. The musical idea–process is motivated by the work’s unorthodox eighteen–tone row, in which the third hexachord reorders the pitch–class content of the first one, and its “competitor,” a twelve tone row comprised of the first hexachord of the eighteen–tone row and a reshuffling of its second hexachord. A second element shaping the narrative progress of the dialectical idea is the question of the complete linear ordering of both rows (one of the musical problems embedded in op. 33a's musical idea). Both rows are often presented with inversionally combinatorial pairings in which any single instrumental or registral line cuts from one partner in the combinatoriality to the other, thoroughly obscuring the row structure. Like other analyses of longer pieces, Boss structures this chapter as a series of snapshots that tour the piece’s form, and provides a helpful overview of the piece’s narrative that the chapter will flesh out in fuller detail in the pages that follow. A roughly rondo–like structure lies at the heart of Boss’ analysis. Three main sections, relying on the eighteen–tone row, alternate with two episodes that draw on the “competitor” twelve–tone row. The episodes, and their associated “competitor” row, take on a dramatic importance here: their evocations of Viennese waltz textures suggests a Totentanz of sorts as Michael Cherlin (2007) also argues. The struggle between the main row and the twelve–tone row is presented as an analogue to Schoenberg’s own encounter with death (in the form of an imagined cardiac event) prior to the completion of the Trio. Main section I fails to present the eighteen–tone row as a linear whole,
succeeding only in stating two of its three hexachords. The subsequent episode does manage to present a full linear statement of the “competitor” row, thereby mounting a forceful challenge to the status of its eighteen-tone rival. Main section II again fails to capture the eighteen-tone row as a linear entity in its entirety, abandoning a full linear statement in favor of stating single hexachords and their combinatorial partners. Episode II eventually achieves a full statement of the “competitor” row once again, but abruptly launches into the third and final main section, assertively yanking the microphone away from the “competitor” row, as it were. The culmination of the piece declares the eighteen-tone row’s victory in the struggle. In the final ten measures, a pale viola line states a single hexachord of the eighteen-tone row. The violin then stutters through a linear presentation of $I_7$, with the cello repeating its final hexachord. The violin finally sings out a full linear prime form in the last four measures. In a nod to Joseph Straus’ work on the piece in the context of his work on disability studies, Boss casts the triumph of the eighteen-tone row as something of a “cure” narrative in light of Schoenberg’s preceding chaotic illness. Both the composer and the eighteen-tone row recover from threats posed to their very existence.

This book is a difficult read. It will demand stamina of its readers, who will need to invest considerable effort in order benefit from the intense and laudable scrutiny Boss has subjected each of his piece to. One of the chief difficulties will be to see the forest through the trees; the detail of the analyses at times obscures that which they are motivated by, the big-picture long narrative trajectories that provide internal coherence to entire pieces. In light of this, one of the chief merits of the book may be its value as a reference work, the cartographies it offers for the music Boss has analyzed. Part of the utility of this book is the relative ease by which one may look up relevant items among its many deft explanations of row structures and twelve-tone processes whenever one needs to gain some purchase on a segment of any of the pieces Boss analyzes, nearly all major players in the Schoenberg literature. I think there may be readers who find the focus on processes conferring unity, coherence and perfection to entire works to be a somewhat uncomfortable analytical precept, not to mention the largely unquestioned language employed throughout of the “hearability” of the twelve tone processes. This aside, the stories he manages to tell about these pieces are compelling precisely because of the long narrative threads he teases out of them. Another point of commendation is that the visual apparatus is among the best I have yet seen for showing just how row structures map onto the scores. Beneath score examples are diagrams of linked nodes of the pitch-class content, tracing the paths of row forms, arranged so as to visually match the layout of pages of the score, labeled as required. If these
diagrams become occasionally cluttered, it is only because they take up the ambitious task of identifying the many relationships and dodecaphonic structures that may be in play at any given time in a visually intuitive and informationally rich presentation. Boss calls out at the end of his text for continued and perhaps renewed attention to Schoenberg’s works, which he asserts have by no means been exhausted of their analytic suggestiveness. The sincerity of the project is unquestionable and Jack Boss communicates both expertise and laudable passion.

Notes
1. See Hepokoski and Darcy 2006 and Caplin 2013 for two recent standards of the New Formenlehre.

References