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## **ALBAN BERG – THE LINKING BRIDGE**

**A historically well informed performance of his early music**

Masterarbeit

Schriftlicher Teil der CD- oder Multimediaproduktion  
KMA-Studiengänge Musik

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present work strives for a historically well informed performance of Alban Berg's early compositions, including *Sieben Frühe Lieder*, Piano Sonata Op. 1, and *Four Pieces for Clarinet and Piano* Op. 5, written between 1905 and 1913. The study seeks to elucidate the evolution of Berg's distinct style during this pivotal period in order to make it more accessible to the audience while fostering a critical understanding of the compositions. The piano serves as a significant linking element since these are the only pieces in which Berg will give a place to the instrument in his repertoire.

The study will be carried from three different angles, a contextualization of the cultural, social and biographical aspects surrounding the composition of the pieces, a direct study of the scores with main focus on the dualism between tonality-atonality and how it leads to ambiguity and the practical interpretative and performative considerations, ultimately culminating in a CD recording that showcase the implications of the discoveries.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this work is, as the title indicates, to achieve a historically well informed performance of the pieces by Alban Berg that are included in the CD, namely: Sieben Frühe Lieder, Piano sonata op.1 and four pieces for Clarinet and Piano op.5, diving into the early music of the composer that stretches from 1905 till 1913. This period of the life of the young Berg will be crossed by a constant development and search for a personal style that will crystallize in the following years.

One of the major interests of this work is to bring closer to the audience the wonderful music of Alban Berg by shedding light on the understanding of his music and enhancing the critical hear. The qualities of his early music make of these pieces the most accesible place from where to approach him. Tradition will be at the foundation of the compositions, the earlier songs like “Die Nachtigall” and „Im Zimmer“ will remind us of the late romantics, whose influence would play such an important role in Berg’s music. Slowly these principles will start reshaping through a process of transfiguration into a sound world of new expressive possibilites. These pieces constitute the linking bridge that will allow him later in his career to give birth to his masterpieces like Wozzeck and the Violin Concerto. However, contrary to his professor Schoenberg and his peer Webern, he will never renounce completely to his tonal origins.

In order to approach the study of the pieces first we will need to have a vision of the historical context that surrounds them. A divided biographical picture into three sections will be presented. Then an analysis of each piece will follow, focusing specially in finding those aspects like structure, motives, harmony and meter that are related both to the tradition and the new compositional methods, observing how they interact and coexist with eachother. The different aspects will be explored through a theoretical and a practical or performative way. The interpretative process will provide further transparency into understanding this music, giving evidence of the discoveries through the sound recording of the pieces in a CD.

# **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

## **EARLY LIFE**

Alban Berg was born in Vienna in 1885 to an economically accommodated business family. He lived in the central seventh district of Vienna until the death of his father in 1900, what had a big impact on Berg, leading him to academic failure.<sup>1</sup> He was brought up in a very artistic and cultural environment, both by the surroundings of the city of Vienna and within their household. His mother Johanna Berg was herself a gifted singer and painter and big cultural figures like Anton Bruckner would often visit the family and perform on their pipe organ.<sup>2</sup> Alban and his other three siblings learned to play the piano by their governess and thanks to the influence and encouragement of his friend Hermann Waltznauer, who played a role as a father figure, started writing his first pieces as a self-taught composer, these were piano duets and songs that would be performed in family and friends meetings.

He always showed a great interest to the culture of his time and specially towards literature and poetry, something that could have very well pruned him to find in the songs his artistic way of expression. He attended on various occasions the performances of Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Mahler symphonies conducted by Mahler himself, becoming one of his favourite composers.

The earliest composition that has survived is the first two songs setting of the poem *Schliesse mir die Augen beide* by Theodor Storm and composed in 1900<sup>3</sup> (over twenty years later in 1925 he would write a second setting, using the twelve-tone technique). The body of songs and duets that he had written by 1908 where over 80 works<sup>4</sup>, although in his life time only the Storm's first and second settings and the *Sieben Frühe Lieder* were published. In 1985 a collection in two volumes of his *Jugendlieder* by Universal Edition was published – The first of them (1901-1904) show his first attempts

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<sup>1</sup> JARMAN, D. (2001).

<sup>2</sup> ADAMS, S. (2008), p. 6

<sup>3</sup> REDLICH, H. F. (1957), p. 37

<sup>4</sup> The exact number differs among sources.

to put words into music, very influenced by composers like Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Wolf, who were the main role models for songs at the time. The pieces collected in the second volume were composed between 1904 and 1908, at a time when he was already studying with Schoenberg (1904-1911), showing a more thorough understanding of the musical language, with use of chromaticism, dissonances, new sonorities, variations and so on that would serve as the bases for his own musical style, balancing Romanticism with more progressive practices.<sup>5</sup>

## **HIS STUDIES WITH SCHOENBERG**

Since he wasn't suited for an academic career, Berg decided on taking a position as a trainee civil servant until two years after starting his studies with Schoenberg, who granted him the opportunity of studying with him without a tuition fee taking in consideration his economical situation. Some of the songs presented to Schoenberg in order to become his student were: „Liebe“, „Wander“, „ihr Wolken“, „Im Morgengrauen“, „Grabschrift“ and „Traum“, the last two being dated of 16 August 1904<sup>6</sup>.

In a famous and characteristic letter written in 1910, Schoenberg described the situation as follows:

“Alban Berg... is an extraordinarily gifted composer. But the state he was in when he came to me was such that his imagination apparently could not work on anything but Lieder. Even the piano accompaniments to them were song-like in style. He was absolutely incapable of writing an instrumental movement or inventing an instrumental theme. You can hardly imagine the lengths I went in order to remove this defect in his talent.”<sup>7</sup>

He started in 1904 with lessons in Counterpoint, Harmony and Music Theory and later from 1907 till 1911 he would initiate composition lessons as such. Some of the exercises were to write chorals of six and eight voices as well as variations, although he kept composing his own songs. The different songs belonging to *Sieben Frühe Lieder* were written under the tutelage of Schoenberg and they show already a greater musical

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<sup>5</sup> ADAMS, S. (2008). P. xv

<sup>6</sup> POPLÉ, A. (Ed.). (1997). Part 2 – From Song to Opera. P. 54

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 53

maturity. In 1907 a concert of Schoenberg's students took place in which three of the songs were played together with a double fugue for string quintet and piano (very well considered by Schoenberg). Around 1907 and 1909 multiple early piano pieces in the form of Impromptu, Minuet, Walzer, Scherzo and variations were written, culminating with the 12 Variations on an original Theme (1908) (with recalls from the Beethoven of the Diabelli Variations and Brahms). However, they are a reflection of Schoenberg's strict teaching rather than a product of his own creativity<sup>8</sup>.

His studies with Schoenberg would close with a study of Sonata form. We find draft of five piano sonatas, which show already the development of Berg's musical language, parting every time more from his early compositions of romantic influences towards a much more complex harmonic world. These first drafts gave birth to his one movement Piano Sonata op.1 (1908). The piece was originally intended as a multimovement work, although after writing the first one he felt out of inspiration. To what Schoenberg answered: „Well then, you've said all there was to say“. <sup>9</sup>

One of the main teaching concepts by Schoenberg was the “developing variation”, in which a single idea would be the seed from where to produce the whole material for a work in order to give cohesion and unity (synthesis). T. W Adorno, who was Berg's pupil from 1925 to 1927, writes: “The main principle he conveyed was that of variation: everything was supposed to develop out of something else and yet be intrinsically different” (Adorno, Eng. trans., 33).<sup>10</sup>

## **FIRST YEARS AFTER THE STUDIES<sup>11</sup>**

After finishing his studies with Schoenberg they kept their relationship, although not without difficulties. Some of the activities that his professor required him to carry out while he was away were either of daily life nature or arranging and correcting some of Schoenberg's music, among others „Gurrelieder“ and the second String Quartet.

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<sup>8</sup> SCHERLIESS, V. (1975), P.26

<sup>9</sup> 'Schoenberg, as Berg recalled, commented roughly to the effect: 'Well then, you've said all there was to say.' After that Berg decided to let the finished movement [...] stand by itself and to publish it separately." (Hans Ferdinand Redlich: Alban Berg: Versuch einer Würdigung, Vienna, 1957, p. 355).

<sup>10</sup> JARMAN, D. (2001).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Berg never really left the city of Vienna<sup>12</sup>, unlike his teacher Arnold Schoenberg, who changed several times between Vienna and Berlin in order to build up a career. Berg in the contrary was attached to the commodities of his city and enjoyed very much being part of the cultural life of Vienna. He had a close circle of friends: Karl Kraus (writer and journalist), Gustav Klimt (painter), Adolf Loos (architect), Max Oppenheimer (painter and graphic artist), Egon Friedell (cultural historian, playwright, actor and Kabarett performer), Gustav Mahler as well as Alma Mahler (with whom Berg and his wife Helene had a very close relationship throughout their life), Peter Altenberg (writer and poet), to name but a few.

From Peter Altenberg precisely Berg borrowed a series of short texts from which he composed his first piece after the studies with Schoenberg – his Fünf Orchester-Lieder op.4 (1911-1912). These songs show a mastery of orchestration and orchestral effects that will work as a precedent for the later *Wozzeck*. A performance of the last two of the Lieder were included in a concert which was labeled the *Skandalkonzert* in 1913 conducted by Schoenberg and featuring pieces by himself, Webern, Zemlinsky, Mahler and the Altenberg Lieder. This led to a heavy criticism from Schoenberg that will shatter his confidence towards this composition but also towards himself for the time to come.

In 1913, presumably before the conversation with Schoenberg, Berg wrote his following composition – Four Pieces for Clarinet and Piano op.5. In them Berg takes the aphoristic style, already exhibited in the Altenberg Lieder, and brings it to a further level in its extreme brevity, yet achieving a complete cohesion of the whole piece by developing the smallest particles. The piece has already reached the dissolution of the tonality (to exception of certain features that we will see later in the study) and thus the crystallization of everything learned up to that point, leaving behind the young Berg to a more mature composer that soon will lead to an international recognition.

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<sup>12</sup> This fact could interestingly be related to his attachment with his musical origins, and those elements of tradition that will remain throughout his own music.



## ANALYSIS

### **SIEBEN FRÜHE LIEDER (1905-1908) (without opus number) (Für eine Singstimme und Klavier – 1907) <sup>13</sup>**

The date of composition given by Berg at the time of publication is misleading, since they were composed in different times. The songs weren't initially meant to be a cycle of Lieder. In them we will find already traits of the Piano Sonata op.1 and even the later Four Clarinet Pieces op.5. They were later orchestrated and published in both versions in 1928.

Every song belongs to a different musical style, on the one hand "Die Nachtigall", „Im Zimmer“ and „Liebersode“ remain in the style of Schumann, Brahms, Wolf or even Mahler and Wagner and on the other hand „Nacht“, „Schilflied“, Traumgekrönt“ and „Sommertage“ strive for the exploration of the new techniques of its time, influenced by composers like Debussy or his own teacher Schoenberg.<sup>14</sup> In this case we will focus on the study of the second group, searching for the characteristics that brought him to become a more mature composer and break to a certain extent with tradition.

Some of them are the use of harmony through chords that are viewed as independent sonorites, with dominant or semi-diminished sevenths, being connected by chromatic voice-leading and a bass that moves in fourths or fifths as in a perfect cadence (dominant-tonic). Use of augmented fourths, whole-tone scales and chords made up out of a previous melodic line (as shown in the Figure 1) or use of more unusual intervals, like fourths or seventh, as building blocks.<sup>15</sup>

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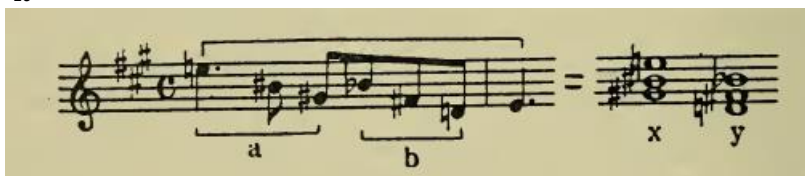


Figure 1: Alban Berg, *Nacht*, b. 2.

<sup>13</sup> The songs are not analysed in this section since the others are more representative of the main focus from this study.

<sup>14</sup> ADORNO, T. (1968). Berg- Der Meister des kleinsten Übergangs P.386

<sup>15</sup> POPLER, A. (1997). Part 2 - From song to opera, p. 54

<sup>16</sup> Image Taken from H. F. Redlich p.38

**Nacht (Text by Carl Hauptmann 1858-1921) (spring 1906):** As the previous image shows, the chords are actually the first to be introduced in the piano part and then they are transformed into melody by the singer. It is in true a regrouping of a whole-tone scale that in b. 4/5 will switch to its chromatically adjacent set, influenced by the music of Debussy and Schoenberg like his Chamber Symphony and “Peripetie” op.16/4. Following the text of the poem, the augmented chord E-G#-B# is first presented as harmonically indeterminate (“Dämmern Wolken über Nacht und Tal”) and later in bar 8 assumes the tonal function of a dominant seventh chord in A major (“Gib Acht! Weites Wunderland ist aufgetan”). In bar 5-6 the harmony will be transformed into a more diatonic one that will lead into a perfect cadence establishing the tonality of A major in bar 9 (a second confirming point will take place in bar 16).<sup>17</sup> With exception of the beginning and the end of the piece the whole harmonic system is a traditionally romantic one, however Berg starts showing his skills in the reuse and transformation of the material from smaller elements rather than long melodic themes, which at the time was part of his education with Schoenberg.

**Schilflied (Nikolaus Lenau 1802-1850) (fall of 1906):** In this song we find already a feature that will be very characteristic in Berg’s own language and style, which is found in the movement of the bass line. At the beginning of the piece the bass trails on it’s surroundings through chromaticism with a tendency towards a deeper register and find its end through a perfect cadence, in this case arriving after 9 bars into the main key of A♭ major (in fact, the chromatic line seems to end on A in bar 4, after which a likely cadence in D major is avoided and via an allusion to B♭ major we are taken finally to A♭ major). It seems as if the starting tone could be any, without tonal relation whatsoever with the intended tonality and through the crawling movement the music, sooner or later, makes its way till it finds what it was looking for. Later we will see that the same principle acts in the Piano Sonata from the very beginning of the piece. The harmonisation of this bass tends already as well towards a break-up with tonality.

**Traumgekrönt (Rainer Maria Rilke 1875-1926) (August 1907):** The key signature indicates that the piece belongs either to B♭ major or G minor, the end in G major would give us a

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<sup>17</sup> POPLER, A. (1997). Part 2 - From song to opera, p. 57

clue that it's rather the second one the main tonality for this piece, however, the beginning suggests a possible tonic B $\flat$ , elliptically skipped between the french sixth chord on F and the E $\flat$  chord (which might be a subdominant), on bar 3 we reach a half cadence in g minor, although its tonic will be avoided until the end of the piece. The bass line in the first few bars keeps descending chromatically, with a turn at the end through the initial motive that will lead to F major (possible dominant of B $\flat$ ). At the end of the section in bar 13 we will arrive, one more time through chromaticism, to an E major chord, leading to the recapitulation with the french sixth chord on F in bar 15. The melodic line is based on a tritone (E $\flat$ -A) reached through a descending chromatic *appoggiatura* on each note. This motive will be constantly recurrent, on the first section by the piano and on the second initiated by the voice. On bar 8 will be presented by its diminution as an accompaniment. This piece serves as an example of tonal ambiguity and use of motivic material.



Figure 2: Alban Berg, *Traumgekrönt*. Beginning

**Sommertage (Paul Hohenberg 1885-1956) (Summer 1908)** – In terms of use of the material this Lied stands above the others. We should take in consideration that this is the Lied composed the latest and contemporary to the Piano Sonata. Berg here already shows a mastery of the variation and development of a short original motive, instead of long melodic themes it is reduced to the smaller particles that evolve in different ways. This is what Adorno will call total developmental character (*totaler Durchführungscharakter*). The basic motive (Figure 2) F $\sharp$ -G-C, is rather a tonal one, since the first note functions as leading note to the Dominant that resolves in the tonic tone, however in the weak beat, which leads directly after into a semitone lower (This last resolving note will be used later on as material in itself). These features give a feeling of uncertainty and a disruption from tonality. In figures 4, 5, and 6 we can observe the motive being used and developed in different moments of the piece. Figure 5 shows only an example of how the motive will be used in the following few bars as an accompaniment element. And in figure 6 the motive has been diminished rhythmically of its retrograde inversion.



Figure 3: Alban Berg, *Sommertage*. Beginning

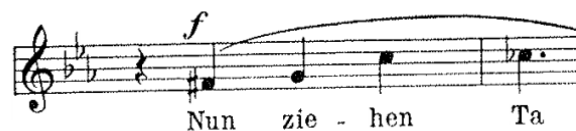


Figure 4: Alban Berg, *Sommertage*. Beginning voice line

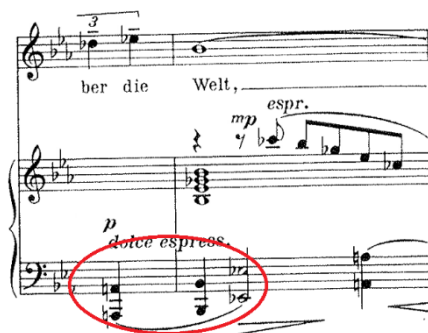


Figure 5: Alban Berg, *Sommertage*, b.4/5

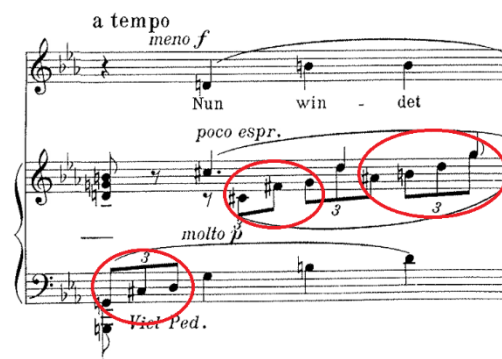


Figure 6: Alban Berg, *Sommertage*, b.10

## KLAVIERSONATE OP.1 (1907-1909)

This piano sonata stands by itself as a work of great artistic relevance, however, we have to remember that one of the goals that it had to fulfill was that of being a study on **Sonata Form** with which Alban Berg would finalize his apprenticeship with Schoenberg. It is based on the established classical Sonata structure consisting of an **Exposition** (built up by two contrasting themes) – **Development** – and **Recapitulation**, giving the perfect frame for a much more developed and experimental harmonic language and treatment of the material. The Piano Sonata will play a very important role as a turning point in Berg's music but also in music history, serving as a linking bridge between the old and the new, holding onto tradition and moving towards its dissolution, or stating it more plainly, between tonality and atonality. In this section we will search for evidence of these opposing qualities and try to understand how they interact in order to give unity to the piece.

The main theme of the Sonata starts with a three-bar unit in which already both features, tonality-atonality, coexist and give the first material from where the piece will develop. As Adorno states it: „The technique of developing variation of the shortest >Model<, the

connection through motivic >residues< and the deduction of all accompaniment from thematic material“ will be the compositional principles throughout the piece.<sup>18</sup>

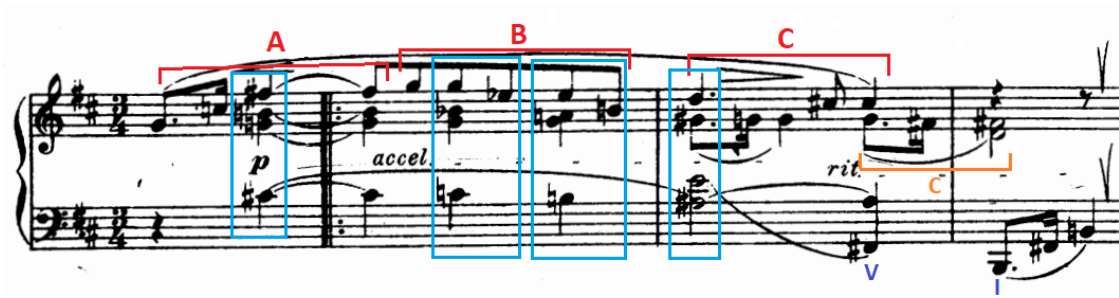


Figure 7. Alban Berg, *Piano Sonata*. Beginning.

We could name three main motives:

- A. The first one is a melodic line rather characteristic of atonality since its voice leading (G-C-F#) is formed by an ascending perfect fourth and a tritone.
- B. Descending melody in two major thirds, forming an augmented chord. (reversed variant of A<sup>19</sup>)
- C. Descending chromatic step with dotted rhythm. (the rhythm has been taken from the first motive and will be developed by augmentation or diminution together with the chromatism later in the piece)

In terms of harmonic structure and bearing in mind that the main tonality of the pieces is **B minor**, we can observe at first a sequence of chords that don't really belong to the main key but each one of them work independently by their own sonority, and being connected in the same manner as described before in „Schilflied" from *Sieben Frühe Lieder*. The first chord is built up by a tritone in its bass, a major third and a perfect fifth (C#-G-B-F#), which is a half-diminished chord with a suspended fourth between F# and C# (this tension is not resolved downwards as normal but chromatically upwards), the second chord could be labeled as a C minor with minor seventh, the third has a cluster-like characteristic to it in whole tones (G-A-B) that we will find in many occasions throughout the piece<sup>20</sup>, and the resemblance of the first chord in the second bar with the “Tristan Chord” is noteworthy,

<sup>18</sup> ADORNO, T. (1968), P. 377

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.378

<sup>20</sup> For example, from bar 49 on, working as the Coda of the exposition, that appear exactly the same later at the end of the piece.

first by their intervallic and by their underlaying principle of the *appoggiatura*, but also for the likeness in their sound<sup>21</sup>. This sequence of chords will finally lead to a perfect cadence, declaring from the very beginning that the tonality as such hasn't been yet renounced. The four-part contrapuntal texture of the piece reminds us very often of a piece written for string quartet rather than piano. In fact, some passages aren't possible to be able to play on the piano, we would need an extra hand, and also the excessive amount of detail in every part would need the work of various separate minds in order to be executed precisely.

From bar 11 till 16 starts the first segment of the transition, that instead of reusing and varying previous material provides new one of great significance for the rest of the piece. The second half of the transition (bar 16 to 28) combines all that has been till now exposed.<sup>22</sup>

Another example of the ambiguity that we have been talking about appears in the Theme B (bar 29) – which starts with an A major ninth, which could be interpreted as the dominant of the expected tonality (in the classical form the second theme would be in D major, since it corresponds to the relative major of the main tonality). However, it develops in a different direction. In bar 32/33 we find a perfect cadence II-V-I to E (dominant of the previous A) which marks the beginning of a developing transition. Developing techniques are transferred to this section, the exposition immediately develops the exposed material. These different features combined are very descriptive of how both musical systems cohabit.

As we saw before, the music of Debussy was of great influence in Berg's own and here in this piece we still find some of the elements borrowed from him, like the use of whole-tone scale and consecutive chords, that don't play a harmonic role by themselves but serve as an acoustic effect on its own. We find a clear example of this, that also combines both ideas, in bars 7 and 126-127 (Figure 8 and 9). Due to this device of thick polyphony moving the different voices at the same time in short rhythmic pattern (mostly of crotchet and quaver) generates a constant unsettled state that helps to detach itself from any possible tonality.

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<sup>21</sup> The "Tristan Chord" does not appear literally, but only as 4/3 inversion on the second beat between a "french sixth" (augmented 4/3 chord) and a diminished 7.

<sup>22</sup> This transition is one of the two options from the classical viennese tradition: Either use the material already exposed (very used by Beethoven), or add new one (used extensively by Mozart)



Figure 8. Piano Sonata, b. 7



Figure 9. Piano Sonata, b. 126-127

The **Development** starts in bar 56 (note that the exposition is repeated literally, thus still following the tonal tradition. In it Berg shows every motive and element exposed till now interacting with each other, if it's true that in the exposition already there is a constant development of material it is however still delimited by the different sections of an exposition and their rules. The development, on the other hand, allows for more liberty. Within this freedom the whole musical narrative develops slowly by interweaving every theme, bar after bar, until arriving to the highest climax in the piece in bar 91 (marked *ffff*). Here again Berg doesn't forget that we are still bound to the origins – this chord is the same as the very first chord of the piece, built up by an augmented fourth, a major third and a perfect fifth (F-B-E $\flat$ -B $\flat$ ), although with the E $\flat$  in the bass that in the following bar will emerge as root of a E $\flat$  minor 6/4 chord. After a succession of dominant seventh chords, in bar 94 the Tristan chord arrives in the same configuration as in Wagner. In bar 95/96 a B $\flat$  major ninth chord will serve as the dominant to a false recapitulation of Theme B, this time with E major ninth as its tonic (which could be considered as the dominant of A major from the first section B). The lowest point of the piece will take place just few bars later, in bar 107 (marked as *ppp*)<sup>23</sup> with a clear E minor chord, marking the beginning of „the smallest transition“<sup>24</sup> that will bring us back to the recapitulation.

The **recapitulation** takes place in bar 110 to 111, although it will lead to further development and to the next climax in bar 127. Affected by everything what happened till now some changes in comparison with the exposition are made, for example, the second half of the transition is now omitted.<sup>25</sup> Theme B, affected by its previous false recapitulation in the development is now presented starting with a B major ninth, which

<sup>23</sup> As it appears in G. Henle Verlag edition of the Piano Sonata.

<sup>24</sup> ADORNO, T. (1968), P.381 (Kleinsten Übergang)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 381

closely enough as to the classical rules, would give the stability required in the recapitulation to remain in the main tonality of the piece.

Another interesting feature arrives in both closing sections, or as Adorno calls it, „the swan song“, of the exposition and recapitulation (bars 49 and 167 respectively) since they are exactly the same. Contrary to the rules of the sonata form, both the exposition and the recapitulation end in the tonic key. One of the possible reasons may be to give support to the stability required for the general form. But also, in both parts it functions as the connective bridge that will bring us back to the main tonality of B minor.

The sonata goes through a whole journey of uncertainty, only framed by its structure and the perfect cadences placed only at the beginning and at the very end of the piece. The process of dissolution of the tonality is clearly visible in this piece, but at the same time the features through which Berg lingers in his fight against renouncing to it belong to the core of this master work.

## **VIER STÜCKE FÜR KLARINETTE UND KLAVIER OP.5 (1913)**

One of the main developments or achievements that distinguish this piece to the other two is the mastery of concise use of the material. How in such short pieces he is capable to condense and connect very strongly all the elements. These pieces can be compared with some of Webern's works such as the Four Pieces for violin and piano op.7 and Schoenberg's Six Little Piano Pieces op.19. This genre of pieces are written in an **aphoristic style**, and are very characteristic of Schoenberg and Webern from 1910 to 1915. Schoenberg would label this kind music „musical prose“.<sup>26</sup> The op. 5 will be Berg's only contribution to the genre.

Unlike the previous pieces of this work, in op.5 we are already in a strictly atonal language. However, in one way or other we can still find reminiscences of what once was, although the elements now behave and interact in a completely different manner, we cannot stop hearing those elements and sonorities characteristics of the young Berg.

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<sup>26</sup> SCHERLIESS, V. (1975), p. 47



We find the first example of **atonal quality** in the very beginning of the first piece. The clarinet draws a melodic line of, a succession of big descending intervals (perfect fourth and minor sixth) are followed by ascending shorter ones, completely detached of any center. The musical gesture resulting from the interaction between these unusual intervals with the articulation doesn't belong anymore to any romanticism, and opposite to the Berg of the Lieder, this is a purely instrumental motive. The clarinet tries one more time in its initial descending jump, now reaching the two ends a further semitone in opposite directions creating a perfect fifth and minor sixth (Berg indicates "schwerer"). In the second bar the piano joins with the second motive. The left hand takes the end of motive A this time harmonized, together with the right hand, by extreme intervals.<sup>27</sup>

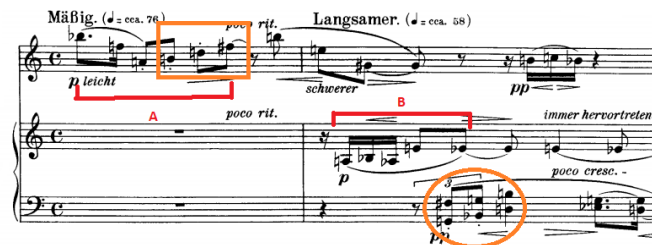


Figure 10. Berg, Vier Stücke op.5/1, beginning

In the second piece, for instance, the initial two notes form a major third (D-F#), that, although they don't represent D major, do trick the ear. The whole piece is centered on four main chords that structure it in a kind of „cadenza-like“ movement (Figure 11). The chords have both atonal and tonal characteristics. The four of them are based on a major third (giving consistency to the piece), the first three also have a tritone in the middle and a perfect fourth at the top. Bar 5 is a transition to the third main chord (which is typical of Jazz music). The last chord consists of a major third (Bb-D) plus another major third, equal to the beginning (D-F#). We first hear the Bb and D, adding right after the F#, what to the ear sounds almost as a Bb major chord with an *appoggiatura* that will never resolve (the piece ends with the same chord as “Nacht”, although in a different context).



Figure 11. Berg, Vier Stücke op.5/2, 4 chords forming an “atonal cadence”



Figure 12. Berg, Vier Stücke op.5/3, b. 3

<sup>27</sup> Note that within this atonal beginning there are three triad arpeggios, sounding A minor and D major in the clarinet, G minor in the lower part of the piano

We find another example of Berg somehow lingering to the past in the third piece: After an introduction from the clarinet and the piano a distorted plagal cadence (IV-I) serves as transition to the next section (see figure 12). In the beginning of the fourth piece Berg insists repeatedly on a polytonal chord, combining at least three median chords (C, E, and A $\flat$ ) with C on its base. The same piece will end with a „C major with major seventh“ chord. (Figure 8 and 9)



Figure 13. Berg, Vier Stücke op.5/4, beginning.

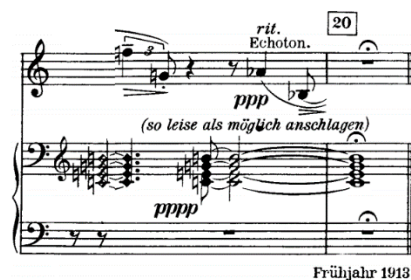


Figure 14. Berg, Vier Stücke op.5/4, end.

For the chords a similar process happens, the intervals are very varied, from cluster of notes with very close intervals to larger formations of long sequences of 4ths. Even though some chords could be seen from a traditional perspective by themselves, they are however not linked with its surrounding by traditional means, but their purpose comes rather from their own particular sounding qualities. (see figures 15 and 16)

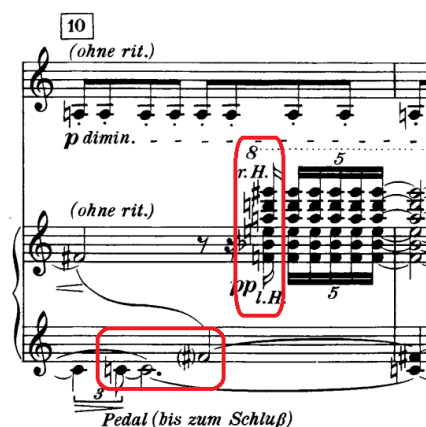


Figure 15. Berg, Vier Stücke op.5/1, b. 10

Together with the dissolution of tonality and the emancipation from tonal centers we assist simultaneously the release of the music from its metrical boundaries. Berg himself would say about this aspect: „For us, the bar line is no longer there to put the melody or phrasing in chains... the rhythms swing completely freely and without being bound to any

regularity. After all, the bar line is no longer a matter of form or architecture, but rather an indispensable means of communication in music with more than one instrument<sup>28</sup>

Some examples of this new vision of the rhythm can be observed in the following examples:

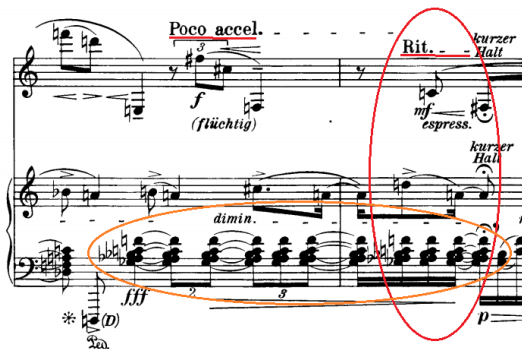


Figure 16. Berg, Vier Stücke op.5/1, b. 8/9

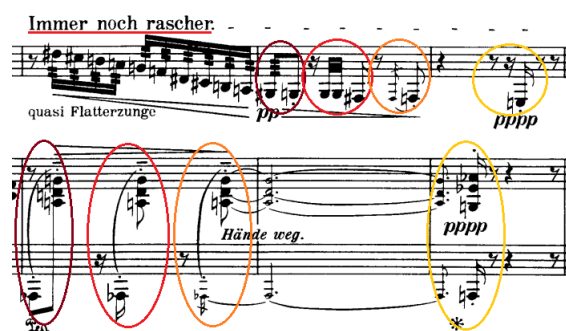


Figure 17. Berg, Vier Stücke op.5/3, ending.

In the figure 9 we can observe how the left hand of the piano creates an accelerando through the use of every time shorter rhythmical values, however this cell or musical idea starts on the second bit of a 4/4 bar and reaches the following bar till it stops, therefore the bar line doesn't play a metrical role. He doesn't just transcribe the rhythmical values but also indicates "Poco accel.", which could seem a little bit redundant, and at the end "Rit.", which could seem contradictory.

In the second example both instruments communicate with each other generating a rhythmic canon of acceleration in which, in the case there wasn't any bar line, wouldn't affect to the final result. In case there was doubt about it he indicates „Immer noch rascher“ till the very end of the piece.

At the end of the last piece the concept of **developing variation** is clearly stated – the motive in the piano (B-C#-D-Bb-F#) is extended four times more every time by adding a deeper note as an arriving point till it reaches the lowest register on the piano. This theme is followed by a fast chromatic passage on the clarinet that leads to a *staccato* note extending continuously till reaching the highest range and an accompanying *tremolo* on the piano with every time faster values and bigger harmonic weight.

<sup>28</sup> SCHERLIESS, V. (1975), p. 47 („Miscellanea musicologica“ 18, Prag 1965, p.63)

## CONCLUSIONS

Due to the shortness of this type of study it is impossible to delve in all the nuances that these works bear, only some representative example can be presented in order to bring some light to the main questions. The complexity of their harmonic world, the intricate interweaving of all the elements, from the smallest particles to the biggest structures, lead to ambiguities that allow for multiple interpretations. What is the function of this or that chord? Do they belong together or do they work independently? How are they connected? Given an initial motive, till what extent are the following elements extracted from that original idea? How is it structured? As a performer, how should the multiple details in articulation and phrasing be handled? How do very opposing systems like tonality and atonality get to live together? And what actually belongs to one or the other? The answer to these and many other questions will bring each interpreter to come up with their own personal performance of the pieces.

However, the more one dives into every aspect surrounding the pieces as entities, and the more informed every facet is, the closer will be the performance to the original vision of the composer. The listening of some recordings and audio material can as well shed light in the search for these answers.

The written part of this project shows in reality only a fraction of the total work accomplished in order to bring these pieces to life. The hours spent on the piano and through the team work with the other musicians are sometimes even more revealing of the actual nature of this music. Sometimes only through multiple playing a single or a sequence of chords, thanks to the intelligence of our ear, we can find answers to the questions above exposed and many others. However, both types of study were essential in order to give to the CD the shape in sound in which it's presented now.

## CD PRODUCTION

The production of the CD started in the first place with the choice of the pieces. Since my main studies are in Piano Performance, I had to find the repertoire specific for my instrument. The Piano Sonata op.1 by Alban Berg was already part of my program and in the past few months I had developed a big interest in the music of the second Viennese School, especially in its early stages of transformation, as well as other contemporary composers of the late romanticism like Richard Strauss or Gustav Mahler. The natural process would be then to find other works together with the sonata that would give cohesion to a CD and an interesting and varied perspective to it. Having these few points in mind the *Sieben Frühe Lieder* and the *Four Pieces for Clarinet op.5* were clearly the right pieces for this purpose and through them I would be able to get to know and study this period, giving me a more thorough vision of its musical and cultural intricacies.

In every piece I faced different difficulties, the Piano Sonata was the first to be studied although the second in being recorded. It was the one that encouraged me to pursue this line of study, first from its sound appeal but also due to the lack of understanding of the complexities of this musical language. After spending many hours on the piano the music became part of my system and the multiple nuances were revealed, coming back to the text confirmed many intuitive musical details, like phrasings, articulation, agogic and so on, but also made me realize of the endless layers that this music offers. Once the work was accomplished in depth, the recording of the sonata was a clear task – first a run through of the piece was carried out, since my goal was to show as much as possible every aspect of the piece that I had discovered. We decided to repeat the sections where I could convey my vision in a better way. After having gathered all the material I got to listen to the different takes and make a selection of the most suitable ones. The final product can be heard on this CD.

The second piece to be approached was the *Sieben Frühe Lieder*. Thanks to my previous understanding of Berg's musical thinking it was a more direct procedure. Every single song however threw new light into his world. Since they belong to an earlier stage of Alban Berg's development it allowed me to understand the origins of certain

compositional operations that would extend even to his atonal works, in this case the op.5. Working with the singer was a very stimulating process, specially having in mind that most of Berg's repertoire is devoted to the voice. Together we discussed the different technical difficulties, the musical and expressive aspects and how the music serves the text in order to emphasize the words, the sonorities and the gestures. The recording process was a similar one to that of the sonata, although this time we decided to record in a bigger hall, which would support acoustically the more substantial and wider voice range and quality that these pieces require.

At last we felt ready, in terms of understanding tools, to approach the Four Pieces for Clarinet and Piano op.5 from the right angle. Although technically they don't entail big struggle, in order to fulfill an organic interpretation we had to unravel the internal elements, especially that of „harmony“, meter and sonority so that we could be faithful to the text and yet make it our own and overcome the distance of both instruments and bringing them together as a unity. The shortness of the pieces allowed us during the recording session to focus closely on the details and even to concentrate our attention to only one or two bars at a time.

After the production process of deciding and putting all the pieces of the puzzle together, the final result was a very satisfactory one which all its participants are very eager to share, hoping to have contributed in a positive way to the further distribution and understanding of this fantastic music.

The process as a whole of bringing this CD into life has being surely very enriching on a personal level, both from the theoretical and from the performative side, and has certainly fulfilled the original necessity of understanding and appreciating this music from a broadened point of view and enjoying it from almost every perspective that music can be enjoyed from.

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