



An Exploration of Arnold
Schoenberg's
Pierrot Lunaire

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Context

- Who is the character of Pierrot?
 - Commedia dell'arte (Northern Italian improvised theatre) stock character (one of the *zanni*).
 - Memorable for his specific costume of “powdered face and loose white blouse” and known for being the sad, sentimental clown.¹
 - In love with Colombine (the ingenue), who typically leaves him for other stock character, Harlequin.
 - First appeared in French playwright, Moliere’s, *Don Juan*, in 1660 -- “name of a peasant character who appears in the second act of the play, the fiancé of Charlotte.”²

¹Helen Kim, et al, “Pierrot In History,” ACS Study Module: Pierrot Lunaire in History, July 2003, lunanova.org/pierrot/history.html.

²Culturedarm, “Pierrot Through the Arts: The Cultural History of a Sad Clown,” Culturedarm, August 7, 2017, <https://culturedarm.com/pierrot/>



Charles-Michel Geoffroy & Beebuk. “Paul LeGrand As Pierrot.” Paris, Posted March 25, 2010. “Accessed 2 February 2020.

Pierrot's Significance

"Pierrots were endemic everywhere in late nineteenth/early twentieth century Europe as an archetype of the self-dramatizing artist, who presents to the world a stylized mask both to symbolize and veil artistic ferment, to distinguish the creative artist from the human being. Behind the all-enveloping traditional costume of white blouse, white trousers, and floured face, the Pierrot-character changed with the passage of time, from uncaring prankster to romantic malheureux to Dandy, Decadent, and finally, into a brilliant tormented figure submerged in a bizarre, airless inner world."³ -- Susan Youens

³ Helen Kim, et al, "Pierrot In History," ACS Study Module: Pierrot Lunaire in History, July 2003, lunanova.org/pierrot/history.html.

Pierrot Lunaire & Its Historical Context

- Commissioned as a “melodrama” by Viennese actress, Albertine Zehme in 1912.
- Setting of 21 poems by Belgian poet, Albert Giraud -- translated into German by Otto Erich Hartleben. Written at age 38, in three months.
- Poems are in rondeau form:
 - 3 stanzas consisting of 4, 5, and 4 lines; lines 1 and 2 are repeated as lines 7 and 8, and final line is repeat of line 1.
- Second appearance of *Sprechstimme* vocal technique within Schoenberg’s compositional output (the first of his works to incorporate *Sprechstimme* were his *Gurre-Lieder*).
- First performed October 16, 1912 with ensemble behind a screen and Albertine Zehme dressed up as Colombine; took 40 rehearsals to perfect!
- Completely atonal but does not employ Schoenberg’s twelve-tone technique.
- Parallels the Expressionist Movement in painting: Kandinsky; Franz Marc - pioneers of abstract art.
- Pierrot Lunaire and Four Orchestral Songs - Last pieces composed before World War I.

Musical Structure of Pierrot Lunaire

- Consists of 21 movements divided into 3 parts with various instrumental configurations:
 - Part I - Introduces us to Pierrot and his sinister realm.
 - Part II - Grows darker and more distorted - Pierrot is beheaded in the 13th movement.
 - Part III - Pierrot journeys back to his homeland in Bergamo.
- Five instrumentalists playing total of eight instruments in various configurations
 - Flute (Piccolo)
 - A-Clarinet (B-flat clarinet, Bass Clarinet)
 - Violin (Viola)
 - Cello
 - Piano
 - Voice

Musical Structure of Pierrot Lunaire

A list of which instruments play which movements: smallest instrumentation is mvt 7 for voice and flute; largest is mvt. 21.

Short title		Instruments							
		Player 1	Player 2		Player 3		Player 4		Player 5
		Pf.	Fl.	Pic.	Cl.*	BCl.	Vn.	Va.	Vc.
1	Mondestrunken	X	X				X		X
2	Colombine	X	X		X		X		
3	Dandy	X		X	X				
4	Wascherin		X		X		X		
5	Valse	X	X		X	X			
6	Madonna	#	#			#	#		#
7	Mond		X						
8	Nacht	X				X			X
9	Gebet	X			X				
10	Raub		X		X		X		X
-	[Transition]	X							
11	Messe	#		#		#		#	#
12	Galgenlied			X				X	X
13	Enthauptung	X				X		X	X
-	[Transition]		X			X		X	X
14	Kreuze	#	#		#		#		#
15	Heimweh	X			X		X		
16	Gemeinheit	#		#	#		#		#
17	Parodie	X		X	X			X	
-	[Transition]	X							
18	Mondfleck	#		#	#		#		#
19	Serenade	X							#
-	[Transition]	#	#		#		#		#
20	Heimfahrt	#	#		#		#		#
21	Duft	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
X		instrument is used							
#		instrument is used and all five instrumentalists are playing							
*		clarinet is in A except in 'Der Mondfleck', which calls for clarinet in Bb							

J Dunsby, Schoenberg:
Pierrot Lunaire.
Cambridge University
Press, 1992, p. 23

Musical Structure of Pierrot Lunaire

- Opening 7-note motive (consisting of various major/minor thirds) in piano reappears in several different movements under different guises.
 - Mvt 7. - Flute in measure 3 - running 16th notes
 - Mvt. 8 (O14 canon) - between bass clarinet, cello, piano and voice (“verschwiegen”).
 - Mvt. 9 clarinet in measure 2 (seven-note motive reappears).

Mvt 1. - piano, mm. 1

Bewegt (♩ ca 68 – 78)

Klavier. *pp*

Mvt. 7 - flute, mm. 4

Mvt. 9 - clarinet, mm. 2

Arnold Schoenberg, *Verklärte Nacht & Pierrot Lunaire*, Edited by Stanley Appelbaum, 2nd ed, Mineola: Dover, 1994.

Musical Structure of Pierrot Lunaire

- In addition to intervallic and motivic structuring, what gives *Pierrot Lunaire* structure?



Musical Structure of Pierrot Lunaire

- Use and parody of older musical forms including the 3/4 “Valse” (mvt. 5 and 16), the serenade (mvt. 19) “Passacaglia” (mvt. 8 - which employs an ostinato and canonic structure between parts), and Barcarole (mvt. 20).
- Mvt. 18 - “Der Mondfleck” employs a fugue between the piccolo and clarinet parts (which invert at measure 10) and canon between violin and cello parts.
 - The piano plays the piccolo and clarinet parts twice as slowly, and finishes right before the retrograde.
- Extra-musical associations - Schoenberg was very afraid of the number 13, and titled mvt. 13 “Beheading” to represent the death of Pierrot.
 - Being purposefully ironic and specifically avoiding text-painting (i.e. in mvt. 19, “Serenade,” the singer describes Pierrot “scratching at his viola and playing a “pizzicato,” whereas, Schoenberg sets the first part of the piece for cello and piano, and gives the cello a lyrical, arco line at the “pizzicato.”

Demo

- Movement 13 employs the same flute melody from movement 7; however, Schoenberg arranges the melody for larger ensemble of flue, bass clarinet, viola, and cello
 - Flute takes on role of soloist.
 - Harkens back to mvt. 7 → cyclical journey.



Performance Practice Issues

- Sprechstimme:

“In the Preface to the score Schoenberg provides the following instructions relative to Sprechstimme.

The melody given in the Sprechstimme by means for notes is not intended for singing (except for specially marked isolated exceptions). The task of the performer is to transform it into a speech-melody, taking into account the given pitch. this is achieved by:

I. Maintaining the rhythm as accurately as if one were singing, i.e. with no more freedom than would be allowed with singing melody;

II. Becoming acutely aware of the difference between singing tone and speaking tone: singing tone unalterably stays on the pitch, whereas speaking tone gives the pitch but immediately leaves it again by falling or rising. However, the performer must be very careful not to adopt a singsong speech pattern. That is not intended at all. Nor should one strive for realistic, natural speech. On the contrary, the difference between ordinary speaking and speaking that contributes to a musical form should become quite obvious. but it must never be reminiscent of singing.”

Performance Practice Issues

“Moreover, I stress the following concerning performances:

It is never the task of performers to recreate the mood and character of the individual pieces on the basis of the meaning of the words, but rather solely on the basis of the music. the extent to which the tone-painting-like rendering of the events and emotions of the text was important to the author is already found in the music. where the performer finds it lacking, he should abstain from presenting something that was not intended by the author. He would not be adding, but rather detracting.”

Helen Kim, et al, “Sprechstimme.” ACS Study Module: Pierrot Lunaire in History, July 2003, <http://www.lunanova.org/pierrot/sprech.html>.

Performance Practice Issues

- To do conducted or unconducted?
- For those with instrument doublings, what do you think their purpose is?
 - Do they present challenges, and how do you go about approaching them?
- Rehearsal time: how long does it take to put *Pierrot Lunaire* together?
- For vocalist, how do you approach German diction, poetry, and Sprechstimme?
- What are our individual processes vs. larger collaborative process?

For composers, what makes the *Pierrot Ensemble* so appealing?

- **Balance of timbres:** the instrumentation uses members from most orchestral families (strings, woodwinds, piano and/or percussion) with high and low instruments in each family.
 - Leaves out instruments that could overpower the ensemble (i.e. brass).
 - Piano is the solidifying force of the ensemble -- encompasses both high and low ranges of all instruments.
- **Combination of melodic versus percussive instruments:** While piano functions percussively, it can also be used melodically (e.g. "Mondestrunken").
 - Later in the 20th century, composers began to add percussion.
- From Nicholas Photinos: "Many reasons: it's a great, small, economical mini-orchestra. It can have the sweep of an orchestra, the groove of a rock band, yet is small enough to be a finely tuned sports car like a string quartet. I think one of that orchestration's greatest assets, and what sets it apart from other standard small ensembles like string quartets and woodwind and brass quintets, is that there is so much variety of timbre, so the ear never gets bored. Though of course, a composer can also write in a way to achieve a great blend across the group."

<https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/mondestrunken/>

Other Pieces for Pierrot Ensemble

[Kay Rhie's I Hear The Sound Of Trees](#) (Pierrot ensemble)

[Kian Khalilian's ...be tamásháye tolúe khorsheed... \(In Memory of Abbás Kíárostamí\)](#) (Pierrot ensemble)

[Ania Vu's Tik Tak](#) (Pierrot ensemble minus piano + percussion)

[Jennifer Higdon's Zaka](#) (Pierrot ensemble (no voice) + percussion)

[Barbara White's Learning to See](#) (Pierrot ensemble + percussion)

Questions?

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