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Analysis of the Four Orchestral Songs Opus 22

Author(s): Arnold Schoenberg and Claudio Spies

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# ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR ORCHESTRAL SONGS OPUS 22\*

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG

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In the recently published *Letters* (edited by Erwin Stein; London, 1964), the circumstances attendant upon the first performance of the Op. 22 Songs are clearly revealed. Schoenberg had been compelled by ill health to move to the south of Europe, and by October, 1931 had settled in Barcelona. There he worked on Act II of *Moses und Aron*. During January, 1932, he received Rosbaud's invitation to deliver a lecture in connection with the prospective performance of the Op. 22 Songs over the Frankfurt radio. Schoenberg was anxious to accept—and curious, of course, to hear his Op. 22 for the first time—but had severe misgivings about the effect that the trip northward might have on his illness. The three published letters to Rosbaud from this time (dated January 19, January 30, and February 13, 1932) are full of vacillations, hoping in one sentence that he might yet take the trip, and realizing in the next that he cannot go. Schoenberg says, also, that the Frankfurt station cannot be heard in Barcelona. In the letter of January 30, Schoenberg tries rather desperately to find a way to comply with Rosbaud's request, but he does not have the music of Op. 22 with him, and he writes a tabulation of possible dates on which return letters, music, and confirming telegrams might be sent and received, as well as the date on which the lecture might be finished. He proposes to travel on the 16th. . . . "But shall I then be in time for the rehearsals in Frankfurt? Shall we risk it?" The next letter is very downcast, and there is hardly any hope for the trip: "Snow has been falling here for

\*NOTE: It should be borne in mind that this essay was specifically written to be *heard* rather than *read*. The disposition of paragraphs has therefore been left intact, so as to permit the reader to 'hear' the natural pacing of the speaker's voice.

Of all 75 musical illustrations called for in the text, nearly half were intended for actual performance by an orchestra and a singer. Since it would obviously be too cumbersome to provide these orchestral illustrations in full by having them printed, they will instead be referred to, in their appropriate locations, by mention of page and measure numbers in the commercially available score of Op. 22. Such references will appear in the left-hand margins.

The remaining illustrations, mainly for piano with or without the singer, are included in exactly the same manner as in Schoenberg's manuscript, and are placed in the center of the page.

## PERSPECTIVES OF NEW MUSIC

three days, to the utter amazement of the population. . . ." Schoenberg therefore suggests that either Rosbaud himself, or Wiesengrund-Adorno, or a gentleman connected with Radio Frankfurt read the lecture. He says that it took him a week to write it.

There is a three-month interval between that letter and the next one contained in the book. But there can be no doubt that Schoenberg had to forego the trip. He did not return to Germany until June of that year. Act II of *Moses und Aron* was completed on March 10. In the volume of *Letters* there is no further mention of the Op. 22 Songs. Subsequent letters to Rosbaud do not refer to their first performance. It is unlikely that Radio Frankfurt would have made a recording for Schoenberg's private use. And one knows of no performances of Op. 22 that Schoenberg might have attended between 1932 and 1951. It is, shockingly, almost certain that he never heard them, and it is known that during his last years their mere mention was painful to him.

Claudio Spies

I COMPOSED the Orchestral Songs Opus 22 in 1915. Their style may best be characterized if I briefly describe the development leading up to and beyond them. About 1908 I had taken the first steps—also with songs—into that domain of composition which is falsely called atonal, and whose distinguishing characteristic is the abandonment both of a tonal center and of the methods of dissonance-treatment that had been customary up to that time. It was this latter feature, as I subsequently ascertained, that occurred if the perception of a dissonance could be ideally equated to that of a consonance.

Yet, indeed, only ideally!—since, in fact, the conscious and unconscious inhibitions in the perception of dissonance existed then and continue still, to a certain degree, to exist not only for the listener, but for the composer as well. Furthermore, while the use of consonances had fulfilled, as it were, the function of shaping form and context, their avoidance was bound to lead to stringent precautionary measures and to require a variety of safeguards.

One of the most important aids to comprehension is clarity of design. *Brevity* facilitates a grasp of the whole; it furthers clarity and it encourages comprehension. Unwittingly, I wrote *unusually short* pieces of music at that time.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have, no doubt, heard that I am a constructor; and I shall not contradict this, since it flatters me—at any rate, it flatters me more to be called a "brain musician" than if I were to be called a blockhead. For I have unwittingly done a number of other right things. There are, of course, various means of different value with which

## FOUR ORCHESTRAL SONGS OPUS 22

to produce formal cohesion within a piece of music. One of these means, tonal harmony, with its emphasis on tonal centers, guaranteed not only cohesion, but also made for clarity of design by articulating the constituent parts. By not using this device in the new direction that my music had taken, I was compelled, in the first place, to renounce not only the construction of larger forms, but to avoid the employment of larger melodies—as well as all formal musical elements dependent upon the frequent repetition of motifs. It seemed at first impossible to find pertinent substitutes for these through musical means. Unwittingly, and therefore rightly, I found help where music always finds it when it has reached a crucial point in its development. *This, and this alone*, is the origin of what is called Expressionism: a piece of music does not create its formal appearance out of the logic of its *own* material, but, guided by the feeling for internal and external processes, and in *bringing these to expression*, it supports itself on their logic and builds upon that. No new procedure in the history of music!—at each renewal or increase of musical materials, it is assisted by feelings, insights, occurrences, impressions and the like, mainly in the form of poetry—whether it be in the period of the first operas, of the *lied*, or of program music.

At the time that I wrote these Songs, I had overcome the initial difficulties of the new style to a certain extent, even though it was only through composition with 12 tones that the formal possibilities of an absolute music were unleashed and broke through, freed from all admixture of extra-musical elements.

Still, I continued to prefer composing music for texts, and I was still dependent purely upon my feeling for form. And I had to say to myself—and was perhaps entitled to do so—that my feeling for form, modeled on the great masters, and my musical logic, which had been proved in so and so many cases, must guarantee that what I write is formally and logically correct, even if I do not realize it. This consideration, as well as one other, increase the difficulty in making a formal analysis of these Songs.

As always during the first decades of a new style of composing, music theory has in this case not progressed nearly far enough. The other consideration, however, is that compositions for texts are inclined to allow the poem to determine, at least outwardly, their form. To be sure, this tendency can generally be noted less in songs than in dramatic or choral music. Yet here, in my Opus 22, it appears conspicuously, for the above-mentioned reasons.

It is not feasible, therefore, in the first place, to present an analysis in the older sense by citing the main theme, subsidiary theme, development sections, repetitions, etc. . . . However, I can show you several other things which are very significant in regard to the essence of musical logic.



## FOUR ORCHESTRAL SONGS OPUS 22

In the ensuing phrase the minor third and second are combined to yield the following shape (*Gestalt*):



No. 8 (Piano)

And similarly in the third phrase.



No. 9 (Piano)

Here, both times, the minor third led to the minor second; by the fifth phrase this order has already been reversed.



No. 10 (Piano)

The half-step A-G# comes first; the minor third G#-B follows.



No. 11a (Piano)

However, there has been an additional development: the minor second B-C



No. 11b

has turned into a major seventh B-C,



No. 11c

a new shape which turns up again immediately in the fifth phrase as Bb-Bb, with its appended minor third B-D.



No. 12 (Piano)



## FOUR ORCHESTRAL SONGS OPUS 22

follows. Thus, the vocal part, which consists of 4 sections separated from one another by interludes, begins the first of these sections with that little phrase. We will now present this section to you. Notice that the three notes constitute a fixed motivic unit which occurs most frequently at the beginning of text lines, but which also plays a part in the remaining portions of phrases. Besides, this figure is varied and developed in manifold ways, as I will show further on. Perhaps you may also notice the accompaniment to the words “Lebens wilder See” and “sei meine Fahrt auch voll von finster Sturm und Weh.”<sup>1</sup>

No. 17: Orch.,  
p. 6, mm. 18–28

You heard the above-mentioned motif first in eighth-notes and then in sixteenths.

a. Voice and Piano      Piano alone      b. Voice and Piano

Er - schei - ne jetzt nicht      traum - ver - lor - nes

Piano      c. Voice and Piano      Piano

An - ge-sicht

d. Voice and Piano

mir wind ver-schla - gen auf des Le-bens wil - der See

Piano

### No. 18

And so on . . . , in connection with which the rhythm of this figure will develop into an independent shape that will appear, moreover, clad with other intervals. I hope I may not have in vain called your attention to a place in the text, for in this regard there are some not unimportant matters of principle to be adduced.

“Wilde See,” “Fahrt,” “Finstrer Sturm,” “Weh”<sup>2</sup>—: these are words whose representational impact hardly any composer from Bach to Strauss could have resisted—words which could not simply glide past without being reflected by some musical symbol. And yet this place affords a very telling example of a new way to deal with such images. I may say that I

<sup>1</sup> “life’s passionate sea”; “Troublous and dark and stormy though my passage be” (Dowson).

<sup>2</sup> “passionate sea,” “passage,” “dark storm,” “woe.”

PERSPECTIVES OF NEW MUSIC

was the first to have proceeded in this new manner; the others who imitated it under a misapprehension have, for the most part, concealed this fact—yet, thanks to that very misunderstanding, I am pleased to acquiesce. . . . It had apparently been thought that I took no notice *whatever* of texts, since with me they no longer give rise to sounds like a storm or swords clashing or sardonic laughter. This impression was exaggerated to such a degree that music was composed to *no* text, or at best to a text *other* than the one which was actually being sung. My music, however, took representational words into account in the same way as abstract ones: it furthered the immediate, vivid rendering of the whole and of its parts, according to the measure of their meaning within the whole. Now, if a performer speaks of a passionate sea in a different tone of voice than he might use for a calm sea, my music does nothing else than to provide him with the opportunity to do so, and to support him. The music will not be as agitated as the sea, but it will be *differently* so, as, indeed, the performer will be. Even a painting does not reproduce its whole subject matter; it merely states a motionless condition. Likewise, a word describes an object and its state; a film reproduces it without color, and a color film would reproduce it without organic life. Only music, however, can bestow this last gift, and that is why music may impose a limit on its capacity to imitate—by *placing* the object and its being *before the mind's eye*, through performance.

In the second section the voice repeatedly employs the three-note motif in a variety of ways. For example, at the words “laute Angst,”



No. 19 (Piano)

or at “in deines Ruheortes”



No. 20 (Piano)

where, to be sure, changes have become evident, so that



No. 21 (Piano)

attests to the original shape



No. 22 (Piano)



PERSPECTIVES OF NEW MUSIC

Here the accompaniment also brings to mind the beginning.

No. 30: Orch.  
(Vlc.),  
p. 8, mm. 48–50

We will now demonstrate this whole section for you.

No. 31: Voice &  
Orch.,  
p. 7, mm. 39–54

I would not have you believe, ladies and gentlemen, that with this analysis all aspects of this section have been elucidated. And it can only be a consolation for me that I may be spared from using those elegant but hypocritical turns of phrase with which it is customary, in analyzing, to gloss over the inexplicable. I state what I see, as far as I am able to express it. Yet in the end, this is still a path on which one must feel one's way, step by step, with the tip of one's toes.

From the final section and its orchestral conclusion, I would like first to show you that the initial motif returns in the voice in the form of a chain of motifs.



No. 32a (Piano)

The motif is included six times:



No. 32b (Piano)

One might be led to believe that this is a coincidence, especially since this motif is not in itself a striking one, and could therefore appear elsewhere without any particular significance—let alone the circumstance that changes do occur in the size and the direction of its intervals. In fact, it plays a not altogether negligible role in the second of these songs, and this merely proves the well-known point that with only one motif it is possible to fashion an unlimited number of pieces, all of them totally different from one another; that in this context the motif need be nothing more than a building-stone, and that the only thing that matters in this respect is the manner of its structuring. Even so, it is not quite immaterial that such a changeable shape should exhibit a certain trait which will circumscribe its use. By the same token, one would not want to build a fortress with playing cards, or make a hayloft of ashlar-stone, or use bricks for a house of cards—to say nothing of a castle in the air.

## FOUR ORCHESTRAL SONGS OPUS 22

Let me now show you a clarinet melody from the accompaniment to the afore-mentioned vocal part:

No. 33: Orch.  
(all clarinets),  
p. 8, mm. 54–59

and from the orchestral conclusion, the *Hauptstimme* in the violins:

No. 34: Orch.  
(all violins),  
p. 9, mm. 74–84

And now the entire final section.

No. 35: Voice &  
Orch.,  
p. 8, mm. 53 to  
the end.

The second song, “Alle, welche dich suchen” from “Das Stundenbuch” by Rainer Maria Rilke, contains the same motif from the first song, as I have already mentioned—but maybe that is no more than a coincidence?—in several places. Nevertheless, I could perhaps point out that here the real connection is another one. That, however, would lead us too far afield, and it would not be worthwhile because the result could hardly be in keeping with a piece such as this song. It is an extraordinarily short song: only 25 measures long. Now, according to my observations, the conditions pertaining to the construction of short pieces are the following: one must be wary of setting up materials that may call for development, since it is unfeasible to grant them any extensive development in only a few measures; besides, one must provide each tiniest element—as in an aphorism, or in lyric poetry—with such a wealth of relationships to all other component elements, that the smallest reciprocal change of position will bring forth as many new shapes as might elsewhere be found in the richest development sections. The various shapes will then be as in a hall of mirrors—continually visible from all sides, and displaying their mutual connection in every possible way. Naturally, I can only show you a fraction of the relationships that I am able to see for myself. But first, a few instances of the above-mentioned motif from the first song; for example, in the voice:

Al - le, wel - che dich su - chen, ver - su - chen dich. Und die, so dich fin - den,

No. 36a (Piano and Voice)



## FOUR ORCHESTRAL SONGS OPUS 22

as the “common denominator” of all shapes in this piece. They already appear in the opening phrase, “Alle, welche dich . . .”



No. 41a (Piano)

“versuchen dich . . .”



No. 41b

“und die, so dich finden . . .”



No. 41c

Likewise, in the second segment:



No. 42a (Voice and Piano)



No. 42b (Piano)

Now listen to this entire second segment:

No. 43: Voice &  
Orch.,  
p. 10, mm. 6–12

The third segment emerges as a middle section whose typical formal peculiarities make allowances for the continued use of the original motifs, in their strict basic forms, to be somewhat relaxed. Nevertheless, in the voice you hear

PERSPECTIVES OF NEW MUSIC



No. 44 (Piano)

as well as



No. 45 (Piano)

Furthermore, consider the part for contrabassoon and double-bass which is built on the succession of thirds.

No. 46: Voice &  
Orch.,  
p. 10, mm. 12-19

In the fourth segment, which acts as a “third part of a ternary structure,” there is again a closer approximation to the primary shapes. Above all, I should like to remind you of the figure in the clarinet (m. 3) and the flutes (m. 4)



No. 47 (Piano)

which now appears, but little changed, in another instrumental context, with the cello part using the motif in thirds.

No. 48: Orch.  
alone,  
p. 11, mm. 20-21

It is even possible to discern the opening motif on its original pitches in the vocal phrase: “Gib deinen Gesetzen recht,/die von Geschlecht . . .”



No. 49a (Piano)

No. 49b

## FOUR ORCHESTRAL SONGS OPUS 22

and, further, in the flutes, directly thereafter:



No. 50 (Piano)

We shall now play the end of the song

No. 51: Voice &  
Orch.,  
p. 11, mm. 20–25

The third and fourth songs afford their analysis far greater difficulties. I would not, however, want to act as if I were withholding this analysis from you merely because I cannot take for granted so thorough an acquaintance with technical notions as might be desirable. Yet, in fact, this *is* the case, as I will prove to you through an example. Nevertheless, the reason is not that—on the contrary, I believe I could almost be tempted to try to present this difficult matter to you in such a way as to allow it to be grasped readily. But in actual fact I cannot do so. I know that these songs do not dispense with logic—but I cannot prove it. That is why I will adopt a different course and touch on something that I have not yet mentioned. But first I must redeem my promise to indicate which complex processes I would have to explain were I to undertake a thoroughly technical analysis.

We will begin by playing for you the first of the three sections into which the third song, “Mach mich zum Wächter deiner Weiten,” from “Das Stundenbuch” by Rainer Maria Rilke, is divided.

No. 52: Orch. &  
Voice,  
p. 12, mm. 1–14

In analyzing, one cannot simply go by the look of the notes on the page. *I*, at any rate, hardly ever discover relationships by means of the eye; however, I *hear* them. Only in this way is it possible to perceive that the first bar of the orchestral introduction and the first bar of the voice part are alike almost to the point of identity—after which one may also see this correspondence in the notes. Listen first to the orchestral passage, played on the piano:



No. 53 (Piano)



## FOUR ORCHESTRAL SONGS OPUS 22

and again



It can be pronounced a law of music that it is possible to recognize (i.e., to perceive) not only the regular rearrangements of musical shapes, but, given favorable conditions, irregular ones as well, provided only that enough will remain constant, once the intervals have been exchanged. The effect will therefore be of repeating or of making a variant, and its purpose could be for transition, introduction, resolution or, simply, for the sake of variety. Here, however, there is another matter, and it is this that I should like to explain to you, insofar as the present scope will permit.

Since Richard Wagner, the treatment of texts in German music has diverged from that of the folksong, as well as from the music of Southern people—for example, of the Italians. Even Schubert does not set off words singly in any marked fashion, according to the weight of their meaning. Rather, by means of a comprehensive melody, he may pass over a salient textual feature, even when it is most important in regard to content and poetic substance. It should not be surprising, then, that a genuine melody will arise relatively seldom from a procedure which strongly emphasizes the text. After all, a melody of that sort would require a good deal of regularity, besides repetitions, concision, etc., so that all these demands could hardly ever be met completely in following the course that an idea may impose upon words, their rhythm and their sound. In these songs I am in the preliminary stages of a procedure which is essentially different both from the Italians and from Wagner. I am myself not yet quite able to say how far this may apply to my most recent works. At any rate, I am aware that it is mainly a concern with the art of variation, which allows for a motif to be a constant basis while, at the same time, doing justice to the subtlest nuance in the text. Here, however, at this preliminary stage, I have not yet carried it so far. As yet, there is no distinctive motif to be varied; nor did I yet understand how to work out so *binding* a shape, as a motif must be, in such a novel way. (One cannot work out shapes that are not binding.) But there is another factor that underlies all this: something imperfect, unfinished, a scaffolding, a skeleton which is clothed only when notes are hung on it, and only then assumes a shape; a succession of tones in a changeable rhythm. That succession of tones will now give rise to the new shapes which will adapt themselves—in their capacity as principal notes—to the words by surrounding themselves with subsidiary,

## PERSPECTIVES OF NEW MUSIC

ornamental notes. With this method of variation, which presumably also plays a part in my later works, I found myself on a path that was altogether right, as the following reflection will prove.

Richard Wagner tells of Spontini, the celebrated Italian opera composer, that he had declared himself, as inventor of the “appoggiatura to the sixth”



No. 57

—which I cannot quite understand—to be the last musician who had anything of consequence to say, since it would be impossible ever to surpass this invention. However wrongly Spontini may, by this curious assertion, have judged the magnitude of his alleged invention, his feeling for the importance of the appoggiatura to a composer who writes music to words was nevertheless right.

I find, in fact, that one may draw the following conclusion from this. During fairly expressive speaking, the voice moves between changing pitches. But at no time does one remain on any one particular pitch, as in singing. Now, in the endeavor to gain a sung melody from the natural intonation of the words in spoken melody, it is obvious that one will have to evade the principal notes in singing, as much as one will avoid the fixed pitches in speaking. If, in the former, one slips away from them, so in the latter case one will surround principal notes with embellishments. Indeed, perhaps it is this which imbued the recitatives in older operas with their liveliness—this embellishment named appoggiatura. If this interpretation is acceptable, light will be shed on many aspects of my works from this period, which might otherwise be difficult to understand. You will then be able to admit that, in fact, both the places that I designated as being practically the same, actually are so:



No. 58 (Piano)

Furthermore, you will then perhaps be able to hear that the three segments which make up the second part all begin with this sort of ornamented figure.

## FOUR ORCHESTRAL SONGS OPUS 22

The first:



No. 59a (Piano and Voice)

the second:



No. 59b

the third:



No. 59c

And now, the whole middle section:

No. 60: Voice &  
Orch.,  
p. 13, mm. 15–27

It will not be necessary to stress that the same thing may also be found in the third section. Please listen to it:

No. 61: Voice &  
Orch.,  
p. 14, mm. 27 to  
the end.

The fourth song, “Vorgefühl” by Rainer Maria Rilke:

I have taken care to discuss a particular aspect of each of these songs, since a purely scholarly analysis would take up much too much time. Now I should like to bring up a few references to the orchestration, because so far I have not mentioned it at all. My orchestration is preponderantly soloistic and, despite the frequently high number of parts, it is mostly *transparent*. Listen, for example, to the orchestral introduction. In the first measure there are three parts, violins I & II and cello; in m. 2 the violins are accompanied *singly* by English horn, clarinet and flute.

No. 62: Orch.,  
p. 15, mm. 1–4

## PERSPECTIVES OF NEW MUSIC

For a typical example of how I combine, and make an entity out of, heterogeneous elements, listen to the *first quarter of m. 5*.

No. 63: Orch.

Or the second and third quarters of m. 6.

No. 64: Orch.

This kind of scoring does not, of course, arise from any affectation, but from the desire to lend color to each part so that it may assert itself among the other participating parts. I think that in this way I achieve a very clear, if slightly sharp, sound which complies with my principle that everything that is written must also be audible. Again, listen to the third quarter of m. 8, in which violins, violas and celli make an odd mixture.

No. 65: Orch.

I also think that the voice part can unfold to its advantage in such surroundings. Let us listen to a portion of it.

No. 66: Voice &  
Orch.,  
p. 15, mm. 1 to  
first quarter of  
10

In the last measure the vocal part was unusually low for a soprano. Yet a rather rich orchestral accompaniment did not succeed in covering it. But notice how delicately the accompaniment is articulated in the following place:

No. 67: Orch.  
alone,  
p. 15, mm. 10–11

Moreover, you may gather from the text<sup>3</sup> that although the voice must provide a “prescient” expression, it must remain calm in doing so:

No. 68: Voice &  
Orch.,  
p. 15, mm. 10–14

There is an interesting sound which I would like to demonstrate by itself; listen to the colorfulness that is possible even in the low register:

No. 69: Orch.,  
p. 16, m. 15

<sup>3</sup>“Die Türen schliessen noch sanft, und in den Kaminen ist Stille;/die Fenster zittern noch nicht, und der Staub ist noch schwer.” (The doors still close softly, and there is stillness in the hearths;/the windows do not yet shake, and the dust is still heavy.)

## FOUR ORCHESTRAL SONGS OPUS 22

It is not easy to provide a good accompaniment to places in the singer's part where the vocal registers change through big, rapid leaps—especially if the expression is also to be underlined. Such was the case in the following:



No. 70 (Voice and Piano)

Notice, please, how carefully the orchestra is gauged in this place—transparent, yet at the same time lending support:

No. 71: Orch.

alone,

p. 16, mm. 17-18

Listen now to the section in which all of this happens, beginning with the low-register sounds that we had shown you a moment ago.

No. 72: Voice &

Orch.,

p. 16, mm. 15-18

In m. 20, the voice goes from its middle to its lowest register, in rapid notes:



No. 73 (Voice and Piano)

I should like to cite the accompaniment to this place as an example of how, with me, the necessity to accompany such a critical place gently and simply is corroborated not only by the instrumentation, but by the compositional means as well.

No. 74: Orch.

alone,

p. 16, m. 20

And now we will show you the end of this song, with which my lecture and analysis will be concluded.

No. 75: Voice &

Orch.,

m. 15, with upbeat

for the voice, to

the end.

—Translated and annotated by Claudio Spies.