



Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*:

the Genesis,

Evolution and

Execution

of its

Sprechstimme

Pierrot lunaire, Op. 21 – “O alter Duft” (song #21, mm.1-3)

Bewegt (♩ = ca 60)

O al - ter Duft aus Mär - chenzeit,

A Survivor from Warsaw, Op. 46 – mm. 35-36

(m. D.)

1.2.3. Trp *p*

1.2.3. Pos *p*

grTr *mf*

ERZÄHLER
out; some ver-y slow: the old ones, the sick ones; some with ner-vous a - gil - i - ty. They fear the

35 Stschl. 36

1. Vcl *f*



Origins of *Sprechstimme*

- **Early Melodrama**

- *Pygmalion* (Coignet – 1770; Benda – 1779)
- *Ariadne* (Benda – 1775)

- **“Modern” Melodrama**


- *Königskinder* – Engelbert Humperdinck (1897)
- *Enoch Arden* – Richard Strauss (1897)
- *Das Hexenlied* – Max von Schilling (1902)



Humperdinck's *Königskinder* – Act I

Gm.

Werd' ich ihn er-rei-chen?



“It originated in Schoenberg’s mind. It was – if you will – an inspiration.”

“I don’t think he did. Since Schoenberg lived, so to speak, in a completely different world, it is very unlikely that he heard any Humperdinck except perhaps *Hänsel und Gretel* . . . The idea of the “melodrama,” as it was called, was generally known . . . but the way Schoenberg used it was certainly quite new . . .”

Gunther Schuller, “A Conversation with Steuermann,” *Perspectives of New Music* 3 (1964-65): 25.



Gurre-Lieder, Part III. 1912 autograph study score

Sprecher

Gurre-Lieder, Part III. 1913 Piano/Vocal Score, transcribed by Alban Berg



“Regarding the melodramas in the *Gurre-Lieder*: the pitch notation is certainly not to be taken as seriously as in the *Pierrot* melodramas. The result here should by no means be such a songlike *Sprechmelodie* as in the latter . . . [There is] no [need to keep the] . . . interval proportions!”

Berg – Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters (New York: Norton, 1987), 143.

Pierrot lunaire, "Mondestrunken," mm. 23-25. Fair Copy. Used by permission, The Robert Owen Lehman Collection, on deposit at The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York

Handwritten musical score for the first system of "Mondestrunken" from *Pierrot lunaire*. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The tempo is marked *pp*. The lyrics are written in cursive below the staff: "Den Wein, den man mit Augen trinkt giebt nachts der Mond in Wogen". The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals, with some notes marked with 'x'.

Pierrot lunaire, "Mondestrunken," mm. 23-25. Published score

Published musical score for the first system of "Mondestrunken" from *Pierrot lunaire*. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The tempo is marked *pp*. The lyrics are written in a standard font below the staff: "Den Wein, den man mit Au - gen trinkt, giebt nachts der Mond in Wo - gen". The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals. A circled number "25" is placed above the staff at the beginning of the second measure.

Pierrot lunaire, "Nacht," m. 6-8. Used by permission, The Robert Owen Lehman Collection, on deposit at The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York

Handwritten musical score for measures 6-8 of "Nacht" from *Pierrot lunaire*. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef. The notes are marked with 'x' and some have a 'p' (piano) dynamic marking. The lyrics are written below the staff in a cursive hand.

Lon. na Gent.
Ein ge ochloemes Zan. . . . her. Buch

What did Schoenberg want?

- **Preface to *Pierrot lunaire***
- **Score and Recordings (over 36 recordings, including two conducted by Schoenberg)**
- **Letters, essays and interviews**
- **“Expert” assessment (Reinhold Brinkmann, Erwin Stein, Joan Allen Smith, Jonathan Dunsby)**



Pierrot lunaire Preface:

The melody given in the *Sprechstimme* by means of 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 a singing melody;
- II. Becoming acutely aware of the difference between singing tone and speaking tone . . . it must never be reminiscent of singing . . .



Sentence 1:

The melody given in the *Sprechstimme* by means of notes is not intended for singing (except for specially marked isolated exceptions).

Sentence 2:

The task of the performer is to transform it into a speech-melody, taking into account the given pitch.

There was ...

“a conflict, from the very beginning, in Schoenberg’s mind between a desire for speech character and another, seemingly incompatible desire for an exact rendering of the notes.”

Pierrot lunaire, "Rote Messe," mm. 24-25

(gesungen)
ppp **Tempo**
(25) (gesprochen)

sein Herz in blut - gen Fin - gern

3 **(25) Tempo**



Recordings

- Ilona Steingruber-Wildgans, Reciter; Vladimir Golschmann, Conductor (1961) – very little vibrato, but also no rising/falling from pitch
 - Mary Thomas, Reciter; David Atherton, Conductor (1973) – lots of rising and falling, but also lots of vibrato
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Most “Sung”

- Yvonne Minton, Reciter; Pierre Boulez, Conductor (1977) – lots of vibrato on *Sprech* passages; straight tone on “gesungen” passages; most classically sung recording in discography

Most “Spoken”

- Helga Pilarczyk, Reciter; Pierre Boulez, Conductor (1961) – very narrow range; little dramatic or dynamic contrast

Most “Authentic/Original”

- Erika Stiedry-Wagner, Reciter; Arnold Schoenberg, Conductor (1940) – very speech-like; not as accurate in regard to pitch or “interval integrity”; not as wide-ranging as other recordings

Most “Bizarre and Crazy”

- Barbara Sukowa, Reciter; Reinbert de Leeuw, Conductor (1988) – outrageous and “over-the-top”; incredibly “inaccurate”; affected; *very* exciting!

Most “Textbook”

- Christine Schäfer, Reciter; Pierre Boulez, Conductor (1997) – very well-performed; pitch and/or interval-accurate; sliding between pitches; vibrato on *gesungen* pitches – “straight” tone on *Sprechstimme* pitches; effective; dramatic but not melodramatic