
Notturmo



Title	Notturmo for Strings and Harp
Time of origin	1896
Premiere	2 March 1896, Wien, Kaufmännisches Vereinshaus
Duration	ca. 4 min.

In his development both as a composer and as a painter, Arnold Schönberg was self-taught. Study of scores by his models, including Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, awakened the ambition in him to become a composer. Until the age of 17, these attempts were, in his own words, restricted to "imitations of such music as I could become acquainted with since my only sources had been violin duets and duet arrangements of operas, on the one hand, and the repertory of military bands which played in public parks, on the other hand" ("My Evolution," 1949). The only documented instruction that Schönberg received came from his future brother-in-law Alexander Zemlinsky, whose acquaintance he made in the autumn of 1895. Zemlinsky was at the time the director of the Viennese "Polyhymnia Musical Society," a group of amateur dilettantes who held rehearsals first in the Rabl Hotel on the Fleischmarkt, then in the National Hotel in the Taborstraße and finally in the restaurant "Zur großen Tabakpfeife" (To the Great Tobacco Pipe) in the Goldschmiedgasse. According to Zemlinsky, the society's orchestra consisted of just "a few violins, a viola, a cello and a double bass." Arnold Schönberg, who in the summer of 1895 had resigned from his position with the banking house Werner & Co, played cello in Polyhymnia in a manner "as fiery as out of tune," according to Zemlinsky's 1934 memoir of his youth. On 2 March 1896, in the hall of the "Kaufmännischer Verein" (Merchants' Society), the first official orchestral concert of Polyhymnia took place; on the program, alongside works including Alexander Zemlinsky's "Waldgespräch" (A Forest Dialogue), was the first public performance of a work by Schönberg: "a very atmospheric Nocturne (manuscript) for string orchestra and solo violin" ("Neue musikalische Presse," 15 March 1896). Schönberg's "Notturmo" was long believed by researchers to have been lost, but Antony Beaumont was recently able to identify the work as the manuscript which had previously been entered in the catalogue under the title "Adagio for Harp and Strings" and was preserved in Washington, DC, at The Moldenhauer Archives at the Library of Congress. The identification was made possible on the basis of a comparison with the Zemlinsky "Waldgespräch" manuscript, which showed part allocations in the same handwriting as well as parallels in the instrumentation (the preferential treatment given to the solo violin and harp). Beaumont in his edition (Universal Edition Vienna, 2001) linked this characteristic to the specific situation of the "Polyhymnia" orchestra, which was able to rely on both an excellent concertmaster and an excellent harpist. Fingerings in the cello part of the "Notturmo," which are clearly in Schönberg's handwriting, provide evidence that the composer himself took part in the premiere. The tempo of the late Romantic work,

written three years before the string sextet "Verklärte Nacht," was originally Andante and only later changed by Schönberg to Adagio.

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