
Six Songs, op. 8



Title	Six Orchestral Songs, op. 8
Time of Origin	1903–05
Premiere	29 January 1914, Prague, Neues Deutsches Theater (excerpts)
Duration	ca. 25 min.

1. Natur
2. Das Wappenschild
3. Sehnsucht
4. Nie ward ich, Herrin, müd'
5. Voll jener Süße
6. Wenn Vöglein klagen

In the late summer of 1903, Arnold Schönberg returned to Vienna after a compositionally fruitful but, career-wise, largely unsuccessful year-and-a-half stay with his wife and daughter in Berlin. His contract as the music director of the literary "Überbrett!" Cabaret at Ernst von Wolzogen's "Buntes Theater" (Colorful Theater) in Berlin which, in spite of its initial popularity, was a flop with Berlin's high society, had expired after only a year. The teaching job at the Stern'sches Konservatorium (Stern Conservatory), obtained thanks to an intervention on his behalf by Richard Strauss, was limited to a single semester. Thanks to the networking help of his brother-in-law, Alexander Zemlinsky (who was artistic director of the Carltheater until 1906), Schönberg began to receive more commissions. However, that also meant that compositional activity had to yield to more practical work such as orchestrations and piano arrangements for two or four hands (including the four-hand piano reductions of Rossini's "The Barber of Seville," Lortzing's "Waffenschmid" and Schubert's "Rosamunde" for Universal Edition).

After composing the *Sechs Lieder*, op. 3 (Six Songs, op. 3), begun in Berlin and completed in Vienna, and an unfinished song for choir and orchestra ("Darthulas Grabgesang"), Schönberg turned in the fall of 1903 to a genre that was new to him (with the exception of the 1899 fragment "Gethsemane" for male voice and orchestra, which survives only in short score): the orchestral song. As he had already done with op. 3, he started with the "Wunderhorn" texts, and in late November 1903 commenced putting to paper "Das Wappenschild" (op. 8 No. 2, completed in April 1904). There followed the songs "Natur," after a text by Heinrich Hart (op. 8 No. 1, composed between 18 December 1903 and 7 March 1904; this composition also exists in an incomplete version for voice and piano) and the Petrarch setting "Nie ward ich, Herrin, müd'" (op. 8 No. 4, with an initial draft dated June 1904). Schönberg spent the summer months of 1904 in Mödling, staying at the house of the parents of his childhood friend David Josef Bach on Brühlerstraße 104. There, commissioned by the publisher Josef Weinberger, he worked with Alexander Zemlinsky on

the orchestration and piano reduction of Robert Fischhof's opera "Bergkönig," which appeared the following year under the title "Ingeborg;" he also worked on his own compositions, such as the First String Quartet in D minor, op. 7, as well as on the Orchestral Songs, op. 8. On July 3, Schönberg completed the score to "Nie ward ich, Herrin, müd." The composition mentioned in his July 14 letter to the head of the "Vereinigung schaffender Tonkünstler," Oskar Posa, was probably – to judge by the chronological order of the sources – "Voll jener Süße," op. 8 No. 5, after a text by Petrarch: "I've begun a new song for orchestra (the fourth). I think it's going to be very good! This time, I've set out to combine the art of voice-leading with that of orchestration. I hope I will be able to do it. My quartet is sitting idle. But maybe I'll get to it after all. Unfortunately, I have to reduce Fischhof for the piano, then expand for orchestra, and keep going! I recently said to myself, if they ever go and erect some of those 'here he composed' memorial plaques for me around the countryside, it would instead read: 'here he orchestrated' [...]"

During the winter semester of 1904-1905, Schönberg taught at the "Schwarzwald'sche Schulanstalten" on Wallnerstraße by the Kohlmarkt in Vienna. In 1904, the secondary school, formerly just for girls, had been expanded into a co-educational school with an advanced training course focused on nurturing artistic talent. The educational reformer Eugenie Schwarzwald had gotten to know Schönberg through Adolf Loos, and hired him for courses in harmony and counterpoint. Alongside his teaching activities, Schönberg worked on a string quintet in D major (which survives as a fragment), completed the orchestral song op. 8 No. 5, which he had begun in Mödling, in November 1904, and worked on "Wenn Vöglein klagen," op. 8 No. 6, as well as "Sehnsucht," op. 8 No. 3 (completed on 6 April 1905). It was not until October of 1913, ten years after the genesis of the first orchestral song, and almost simultaneously with the composition of the first song of op. 22 (Schönberg's only other work in this genre), that the "meticulously revised" scores of op. 8 went into print.

Already in March of 1911, Anton Webern's piano reductions of op. 8 were published by Universal Edition as the first edition. As the world premiere of op. 8 was being planned under Alexander Zemlinsky in Prague, Schönberg wrote his brother in law that "if I am to express any preferences, I would say that the four tenor songs are more important to me than the two others (Natur & Sehnsucht). The most effective one is certainly 'Wappenschild.' But I think that the Petrarch songs are the best ones." In a letter dated 13 August, he once again stressed the programming of the concert: "I consider the best and most effective to be: I. Wenn Vöglein klagen. II. Voll jener Süße. III. Wappenschild. 'Natur' and 'Nie ward ich, Herrin' aren't as meaningful text-wise, and I don't like them as much musically, either." Zemlinsky complied with Schönberg's wish: at the premiere on 29 January 1914, he conducted "Wappenschild," op. 8 No. 2, as well as the Petrarch songs "Voll jener Süße," op. 8 No. 5, and "Wenn Vöglein klagen," op. 8 No. 6. The vocal part was sung by the heroic tenor Hans Winkelmann (son of Hermann Winkelmann, who was the first to sing "Parsifal" in Bayreuth). Arnold Schönberg, who attended the performance and had reminded Zemlinsky beforehand that Winkelmann should sing "p[iano] and, above all, legato [...] and should not exaggerate enunciating the text," wrote to Zemlinsky shortly afterwards from Leipzig: "You know that I had envisioned their interpretation differently,

in some aspects, than you had. But interpretation is what's temporal, changeable in the art of music. It is one of the methods of portraying meaning, of awakening and resurrecting the spirit."

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