
Two Ballads, op. 12



Title	Two Ballads for Voice and Piano, op. 12
Time of origin	1907
Premiere	21 February 1908, Wien, Ehrbar-Saal (excerpts)
Duration	ca. 11 min.

1. Jane Grey
2. Der verlorene Haufen

During the year 1906 the Berlin publishing house August Scherl organized an open competition for ballad poems in its magazine "Die Woche," attracting such writers as Hermann Löns, Otto Ernst and Max Geißler. This was followed, in the Christmas issue of 22 December 1906, by the announcement of a competition for composers: they were called upon to set the poetic contributions, in the meantime published under the title "Neuer deutscher Balladenschatz" ("Treasure Chest of New German Ballads"), to music. It was probably for this occasion that Arnold Schönberg set the texts "Jane Grey" by Heinrich Ammann and "Der verlorene Haufen" ("The Lost Hoard") by Victor Klemperer to music. He remained unsuccessful, for the prizes of one to three thousand marks were awarded to Hans Hermann, Heinrich Eckl und Gustav Lazarus. Op. 12 was also not among the eleven additional compositions that were published in the next special issue of "Die Woche." Schönberg's setting of a third text from the anthology, "Jeduch" by Hermann Löns, remained a fragment.

All three works were composed in March and April of 1907; op. 12, No. 1 is dated 28. April. In "My Evolution" Schönberg describes the ballads as "immediate predecessors of the Second String Quartet" that marked the transition to his atonal period. Harmonically, op. 12 occupies a middle position between that which is (still) tonal – "Jane Grey" is centered in D minor and the related keys of B minor / B major / A minor – and the expressionistic style; it is thus comparable to the first movement of op. 10 that was composed around the same time.

In addition to a largely consolidated, albeit unconventional harmony, rhythm (as in the earlier songs "Warnung"/"Warning," op. 3 no. 3, and "Am Wegrund"/"By the Wayside," op. 6 no. 6) presents itself as a structural element of "Jane Grey." The basic rhythmic motive of one bar appears both in the prelude and at the beginning of the first verse ("Sie führten ihn"/"They led him"), and is elaborated in accordance with the dramatic progression in the sense of 'developing variation', for instance at the semantic climax of the ballad ("dann eilte nach in die Ewigkeit"/"then swiftly followed into eternity") with the superimposition of a dramatic execution motif, or the change from quadruple to triple meter in the epilogue ("Und wenn der Wind in den Blättern spielt"/"And when the wind plays in the leaves") as a transition to the present.

