
Four Songs for Voice and Orchestra, op. 22



Title	Four Songs for Voice und Orchestra, op. 22
Time of origin	1913–1916
Premiere	21 February 1932, Frankfurt am Main, Großer Saal des Saalbaues
Duration	ca. 13 min.

The “Four Songs for Voice and Orchestra,” op. 22, were composed immediately before the outbreak of the First World War. The composition marks the conclusion of Arnold Schönberg’s free atonal phase, which ended abruptly with his military conscription. In the time that followed, the composer’s musical output ceased. During this silent period, Schönberg developed the method of composition with twelve tones. The orchestral songs form the conclusion of a historical phase but can also be understood as being the beginning of a developmental phase that ultimately did not occur.

The greatest innovation takes place in the instrumentation of the orchestra. The classical symphony orchestra usually consisted of two of various woodwind and brass instruments that supplement a string chorus. In the large orchestra of the late Romantic period the development moves toward six highly differentiated woodwind and brass instruments, heavily scored percussion, harp, celesta, and a much larger string force that allows the assignation of multiple voices in the individual sections. Almost all orchestras in the world are cast in accordance with this standardized sound body; this forms not only a musical, but first and foremost a music-sociological framework.

The orchestra as an institution that is predetermined by sociological expectations is negated in op. 22 (Heinz-Klaus Metzger). The new style of instrumentation, which was already applied in the last part of the “Gurre-Lieder,” is most radically expressed in the orchestral songs op. 22. The orchestra includes the following instruments: 4 flutes and 2 piccolos, 3 oboes and 2 cors anglais, 6 clarinets, 3 bass clarinets and 1 bass clarinet, 3 bassoons and 1 contrabassoon, 4 horns, 1 trumpet, 3 trombones, tuba, harp, timpani, cymbals, xylophone, tam-tam, as well as 24–30 violins, violas, cellos, and contrabasses. None of the songs employ the full orchestra. Rather, Schönberg assigns specific colorations to the individual songs through his choice of instruments. In op. 22/1, the string section plays along with clarinets, brass and percussion, in op. 22/2 and 3, a woodwind group is cast as a contrast to solo low strings, and in op. 22/4 to a string quintet. Measured by the norms of the late Romantic orchestra, the relationship of the strings to the woodwinds has been inverted: a woodwind chorus is juxtaposed against solo string instruments. The sound of brass instruments, a mainstay of the orchestral tutti in the 19th century, is almost completely absent.

Innovation can be found even in the musical notation. In the preface to the Four Songs, Schönberg explains: “After much hesitation, I have decided from now on not to publish my

orchestral works in the score form that has been customary up to now." Schönberg called the new form of the score a "vereinfachte Studier- und Dirigierpartitur" (simplified study and conducting score). He cites the following shortcomings of the usual form of orchestral scores: the notation of transposing instruments, which makes it difficult to impossible to read complex structures, and the doubling of passages in different instruments, which require 15–30 lines in the score when they could easily fit on two to six lines. Schönberg's "simplified study and conducting score" should be as easy to read as a two- to four-hand, or, if necessary, a six- to eight-hand piano score. Furthermore, the basic principle is that "the course of each voice can be followed at any time," and in the case of particularly complex passages "the groups: woodwinds, brass, percussion, and strings should be notated separately in order to facilitate individual rehearsals by these groups." The simplified orchestral notation, however, is not the result of a simplified conception of the late Romantic orchestral apparatus. But even though the instrumentation is very precisely indicated, the impression that it was added as an afterthought remains, and it sometimes seems accidental or coincidental. Additionally, the graphical location of the individual instrument groups does not remain constant within the score and thus encumbers the reading. Schönberg did not resort to this form of notation a second time.

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