
Serenade, op. 24



Title Serenade for Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Mandolin, Guitar, Violin, Viola, Cello and Baritone Voice, op. 24

Time of Origin 1920 – 23

Premiere 2 July 1924, Donaueschingen

Duration ca. 33 min.

1. Marsch
2. Menuett. Trio
3. Variationen
4. Sonett Nr. 217 von Petrarca
5. Tanzscene
6. Lied (ohne Worte)
7. Finale

At the beginning of the 1920s, Arnold Schönberg had reached a compositional turning point. With the Serenade, op. 24, he tried out his “method of composing with twelve tones related only to one another” in a large-scale work for the first time. Like other works from this transitional period, the Serenade is not yet completely twelve-tone, but - starting from larger or smaller note groups - is dominated by the idea of developing a work from a basic row and its mirror forms. Here, Schönberg experiments with the possibilities of the new method, embedding a serial approach between sections of extended tonality and free atonality, thus allowing himself more structural flexibility. He tries to compensate for the loss of structure through the elements of harmony, melody, and tonality by using traditional forms in a classical manner, by aligning musical ideas to a text, and by employing particular rhythmic structures. The title “Serenade” already references a genre that seems anachronistic for the 1920s. The music’s progressive elements reveal themselves in conjunction with a historical reorientation. Schönberg composed the Serenade, op. 24 in the years 1920 - 23. The unofficial premiere took place on May 2, 1924 in a private setting at Norbert Schwarzmann’s house in Vienna, while the first public performance took place the following summer in Donaueschingen. The instrumentation harks back to the serenade tradition; by employing mandolin and guitar, Schönberg creates a folk character additionally supported by the use of effects such as *col legno*, *pizzicato*, and others. The first movement is a three-part march. The main theme has an uncommon length of five measures, and soon acquires a rhythmic identity resembling a waltz. The march reappears in the last movement, thus giving the work an arch-like overall form. The second movement is a minuet and trio following in the footsteps of the old serenade tradition, although it is also slightly attuned to the Modernist aesthetic: the consequent phrase of the eight-bar theme, for instance, commences on a tritone rather

than a fifth. The textures resulting from the exchange of pitch collections among the instruments have an almost serial character. The following variation movement consists of a solo fourteen-note melody stated by the clarinet. The second half of the theme is the retrograde inversion of the first half. The five variations of this theme, which are very different both rhythmically and motivically, process the basic series by means of overlapping, segmentation, inversion, and rhythmization. All the procedures of the twelve-tone method are thus already present here, "except for the limitation to only twelve different tones" (Arnold Schönberg). The central movement of the work, in which the vocal writing recalls the style of "Pierrot lunaire," is based on a sonnet by Petrarch. The use of a very old text, completely removed from Schönberg's time, may possess a significance similar to the use of traditional forms, since Schönberg had otherwise rarely dealt with poetry written before the 19th century. This movement is Schönberg's first strictly twelve-tone vocal work. The row is used as a cantus firmus, which, in comparison to later twelve-tone works, seems almost unimaginative and too faithful to the rules of the new compositional technique. Schönberg is, as it were, in the experimental stage; he has yet to explore the limits and possibilities of the twelve-tone method. The primary twelve-tone row is contrasted with the eleven syllables of the stanzas in the vocal part. Since each syllable falls on one note, each stanza begins with a different note of the row. This distinctive feature compensates for the rigidity of the ordering of notes, which is neither transformed nor varied, but rather - differentiated only through registral and rhythmic changes - appears thirteen times in succession. The presence of the row continues in the instrumental interlude, where it appears as a fugato in retrograde form. The obbligato dance movement within the serenade combines two different dances, namely, waltz and ländler. This movement is also based on a row consisting of two independent sub-segments. In a nod to Felix Mendelssohn, the "Lied ohne Worte" is based on a Romantic genre that Schönberg incorporated into the serenade. A quiet melody develops over a bass line, punctuated by typically Romantic accompaniment figures played by the guitar. The finale repeats the march from the opening movement, and recalls thematic material from the other movements.

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