
Wind Quintet, op. 26



Title	Quintet for flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon, op. 26
Time of origin	1923–24
Premiere	16 September 1924, Wien
Duration	ca. 38 min.

1. Schwungvoll
2. Anmutig und heiter; Scherzando
3. Etwas langsam (poco Adagio)
4. Rondo

At the beginning of the 1920s Arnold Schönberg revolutionized the existing rules of Western music with his “Method of composing with twelve tones which are related only with one another.” With the twelve-tone method, a visionary plan for a future compositional order, he laid the foundation for the emancipation from traditionally hierarchical organizational principles that would be decisive for the music of the 20th century.

The Wind Quintet op. 26 was begun in one of the composer’s most difficult years and completed in one of his happiest. On 14 April 1923, when Schönberg committed the first ideas for the work to paper, he had already made plans for a summer holiday with his family in Traunkirchen, Upper Austria, a spa that had been a favorite of his since 1907. When he arrived there on 1 June 1923, he had the first movement with him, having completed it the previous evening. On the manuscript he had written: “I think Goethe would have been quite happy with me.”

That summer in Traunkirchen not only saw an intense period of work on the Wind Quintet and a large number of theoretical and historical writings but was also marked by the serious illness of his wife Mathilde. In September she had to return to Vienna where she was admitted to a sanatorium; Schönberg’s work on his Wind Quintet was interrupted. Mathilde Schönberg passed away on 18 October 1923 in the presence of her husband. After the first months of mourning and the reorganization of his life, the composer had lost the thread of the quintet, and he did not start work on it again until the following summer. Since the spring of that year he had been nurturing a close friendship with Gertrud Kolisch, the sister of his pupil Rudolf Kolisch, and this friendship soon developed into a more intimate relationship. Arnold Schönberg and Gertrud Kolisch were married on 28 August 1924, a day after the completion of the Wind Quintet which was dedicated to his grandson “Bubi Arnold” (little Arnold).

“This method consists primarily of the constant and exclusive use of a set of twelve different tones. This means, of course, that no tone is repeated within the series and that it uses all twelve tones of the chromatic scale, though in a different order [...] The

association of tones into harmonies and their succession is regulated [...] by the order of these tones. The basic set functions in the manner of a motive. This explains why such a basic set has to be invented anew for every piece." (Schönberg: *Composition With Twelve Tones*, 1941). In the *Wind Quintet op.26*, one of the earliest works to use the new compositional method, Schönberg bases all four movements on a common twelve-tone row. The risk of polyphonic redundancy inherent in such a procedure is avoided by the fact that the row is not formulated serially in an unchanging linear sequence but, even at this early stage of dodecaphonic development, uses rotating row segments. At the same time the basic row of the *Wind Quintet*, as in most of Schönberg's later twelve-tone works, is conceived in such a manner that it allows the possibility of an "inverse hexachord combination," in which the tonal qualities of the row in basic form and its inversion a fifth lower complement each other with respect to the two halves of the row (hexachords). Schönberg's son-in-law Felix Greissle, who arranged the quintet for violin (or flute) and piano in 1926 at the behest of Universal Edition in Vienna (in the hope of securing further dissemination of Schönberg's composition by means of the new instrumental combinations), and who also directed the first performance in Vienna, maintained in 1925 that the use of classical formal models, i.e. the return to the sonata principle (first movement in sonata form, scherzo, slow movement, rondo) represented a moment of balance, "in order to remain comprehensible despite these preconditions [of the twelve-tone method]." Theodor W. Adorno declared the "unshackled sonata" shows that, despite the abandonment of the traditional major/minor tonal harmonic structure, it was only the form that had changed and not the meaning of the music.

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