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## Three Songs, op. 48



Title	Three Songs for Voice and Piano, op. 48
Date	1933
First performance	16 May 1950, Los Angeles, Student Union
Duration	ca. 6 min

1. Sommermüd ["Summer Weary"]
2. Tot ["Dead"]
3. Mädchenlied ["Song for Girls"]

On 30 October 1948, Schönberg received a letter from Kurt List, the manager of Bomart Publications, to arrange for distributing newly composed works. The Vienna-born scholar and conductor had known Schönberg for a long time; as part of his work, he had been involved with various publishing houses on behalf of the composer's music. Bomart planned "A Survivor from Warsaw," op. 46 for its first large-scale publication; the String Trio, op. 45 and Kol Nidre were to follow. Moreover, List expressed a special wish: "By pure chance, I came across photocopies of three songs you wrote in 1933. They are based on texts by Jakob Haringer, titled 'Sommermued,' 'Tot' and 'Mädchenlied.' They are extraordinarily beautiful and seem relatively easily accessible, so I believe that they would sell at once and be a success. Could we possibly include them in the contract?"

The songs were written between January and February 1933, a time when the National Socialist party was eroding parliamentary democracy in Germany with rapidly successive actions. The foreword to the first edition, published posthumously by Bomart in 1952, conjectures that the composer had forgotten the work, due to his life-threatening situation in the course of emigrating to the United States. That is hardly plausible, since Schönberg had already caused his assistant Leonard Stein to make a transparent fair copy of the autograph in 1945. However, twelve-tone songs to German words were scarcely viable means with which to make contact with American publishers, so the cycle was put aside. The history of the work's creation is for the most part unknown.

In December 1932, poet Jakob Haringer, notoriously in financial difficulties, asked Schönberg for support; the composer, well off at the time, complied by acquiring his books and likely contributing money. Schönberg's library includes a volume published by Zsolnay in Vienna containing Haringer's handwritten address card and several bookmarks.

In contrast to his usual practice, Schönberg invented a different twelve-tone row for each song. If he actually wrote the pieces primarily as help for the impoverished poet, his decision could have had work-saving reasons; he wrote large parts of the music directly in full score, without comprehensive calculation or material disposition. Limitation to few row derivations benefited the uniformity of each song, while the use of various original ideas contributed to their wealth of variety and independent character.

The gentle yet lively opening piece *Sommermüd* is an observation on the vicissitudes of life, promising the chance of better times when in need. In distinct opposition, in the aphoristic poem *Tot*, merely 18 bars long, Schönberg limits his composition to the original form and retrograde of the basic twelve-tone row, which he subdivides into three four-note groups, allotting them almost throughout to each of the four syllables of the eight short verses, giving the text's terseness a musical counterpart.

In his discussion of the concluding *Mädchenlied*, Theodor W. Adorno emphasized that he sensed in the "most artistic rhythms and richly interwoven, chanson-like piano writing, a reminiscence, perhaps, of the as yet unpublished pieces Schönberg wrote in his youth for Wolzogen's *Buntes Theater*."

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