
Four German Folk Songs



Title	Four German Folk Songs for Voice and Piano
Time of Origin	1929
Premiere	unknown
Duration	ca. 10 min.

1. Der Mai tritt ein mit Freuden
2. Es gingen zwei Gespielen gut
3. Mein Herz ist mir gemenget
4. Mein Herz in steten Treuen

Schönberg maintained an ambivalent attitude towards the synthesis of art and folk music. On the one hand, he states that "if these [differences] are perhaps not as great as those between kerosene and olive oil or between washing water and holy water, these two nevertheless mix as badly as oil and water." (Symphonien aus Volksliedern). The use of folk songs in art music can lead to an overly simplistic structure, a reproach Schönberg aimed even towards Beethoven and Brahms. (In compositional practice, however, the folk song "Ännchen von Tharau" blends in the Suite, op. 29, although it is concealed within the structure of the twelve-tone row). On the other hand, he praises the "overwhelming depth of expression," and claims that indigenous musics are "most interesting in their melodic contours. They are truly beautiful, and one can only admire them." (Symphonien aus Volksliedern). The folk song arrangements of 1928/29 draw their inspiration from the Brahmsian model; they were followed by the Four German Folk Songs, arranged for voice and piano. It seems as if Schönberg the composer had tacitly corrected Schönberg the theorist.

The impetus for the arrangements came from the "Staatlichen Kommission für das Volksliederbuch für die Jugend" in Berlin. The organization committee also gave Schönberg the original cantus firmi and texts. Schönberg was not bound in terms of instrumentation or style. The cantus firmi can be traced to the following original sources: "Schein uns du liebe Sonne" is by Antonio Scandello and was first published in "Nawe Weltliche Deudsche Liedlein" in 1570; "Der Mai tritt ein mit Freuden" is found in the first part of Georg Rhaw's "Bicinia" of 1545; "Mein Herz in steten Treuen" and "Hercz liplich lip" are anonymous movements from a Munich manuscript; and finally, "Es gingen zwei Gespielen gut" is probably identical with the song "Zu Wirtzburg steht ein hohes Haus" in Egenolff's "Graszliedlin" of 1535. Apparently, Schönberg received from the committee more originals than what he arranged for voice and piano, since he used the 'surplus' originals for folk song arrangements for mixed choir.

From its original arrangement for voice and piano, "Es gingen zwei Gespielen gut" was incorporated in the choral version. In the case of the folk song arrangements, Schönberg

struggled with two particular compositional problems. The first was that the time signatures of the originals he received did not appear to be original to him. The second problem concerned the church modes. Schönberg insisted on using key signatures different to those of modern major and minor tonalities. "I did not, however, aim at pure church modes, but rather employed the use of various accidentals as coloring." Thus, from a compositional standpoint, he could engage in a procedure that, historically speaking, could not be entirely justified. "Es gingen zwei Gespielen gut" employs a procedure for which Schoenberg coined the term "developing variation." The six strophes are treated as a "symphonic unity," and caesuras between the strophes are artfully concealed, while the cantus firmus is also involved in the transformations. The version for voice and piano is (as required by the committee) a strophic song with simple piano accompaniment. The arrangement of "Herzlieblich Lieb durch Scheiden" is influenced by Schönberg's intimate knowledge of works by Mozart, Schubert, and Brahms. The discovery of the rhythmic and metrical irregularities that pervade this music allowed Schönberg to develop what Adorno called "musical prose." The fast three-four meter is often interrupted by a four-four meter and leads into a three-two meter, thus elevating the hemiola effect to a structural level. The movement of "Schein uns, du liebe Sonne" seems the most conventional, despite all the motivic interweaving and the ever-developing cantus firmus. Schönberg adopts a diatonic melodic structure that echoes 16th-century Lied practice, and also permeates the harmonic content.

Of the "Four German Folk Songs" he arranged for voice and piano in 1929, Schönberg revisited three of them in 1948 in order to arrange them for mixed choir. In contrast to earlier choral movements, he considered them worthy of an opus number: the three choral movements thus became his op. 49.

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