

## Alban Berg – *Sieben frühe Lieder*. Performance perspectives

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*Berg’s worldwide reputation had been consolidated with orchestral and chamber works and the opera Wozzeck. (...) For different reasons, his dimension as a composer of songs does not seem to be very large, and yet it is fundamental to his personality nevertheless.*

Mark DeVoto

**Abstract:** The study presents several interpretative suggestions made from the perspective of the accompanying pianist that played Alban Berg’s *Sieben frühe Lieder*. Why this topic? Because in the Romanian music literature, there is nothing written about the song cycle *Sieben frühe Lieder* by Alban Berg, which is a representative work in the history of the art song. The theme, addressed in the literature written abroad, is treated mostly from a musicological standpoint. That is why we considered it useful to make some observations of an interpretative nature. They will become relevant if read in parallel with the PhD thesis entitled *Alban Berg’s “Sieben frühe Lieder”: An Analysis of Musical Structures and Selected Performances*, written by Lisa A. Lynch (the only documentary source that proposes in-depth syntactic analyses of the work, associated with valuable interpretative suggestions made from a vocal perspective). We also considered useful, during the study, the comparison between the two variants of the work: the chamber/voice-piano version and the orchestral version. The analysis of the symphonic text was carried out intending the observation of significant details useful for realizing an expressive duo performance. Of course, our interpretative suggestions are a variant between many others. However, irrespective of dynamic, agogic, timbral, and articulation elements highlighted by the various performances, the reference point of any interpretative view remains the musical text, whose syntactic wealth opens up a generous semantic area.

**Keywords:** extended tonality, motif, phrasing, articulation, orchestral version.

From the performer’s perspective, the only bibliographical reference about this song cycle is a PhD thesis – *Alban Berg’s “Sieben frühe Lieder”: An Analysis of Musical Structures and Selected Performances*, by Lisa A. Lynch. Exceptionally well documented in the aesthetic, syntactic, and morphological

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areas, the thesis still does not access the interpretative options from the perspective of the practitioner bent over the details of the work. However, it contains valuable references concerning the comparative analysis. For this reason, we considered it useful to carry out a study proposing suggestions on detailed performance aspects – that we recommend reading after the said work, which can hold a preliminary role in the process.

The song cycle *Sieben Frühe Lieder* bears the dedication *Meiner Helene*. Berg composed it at the beginning of the relationship with Helene Nahowski, his future wife, whom he met in 1906, and he dedicated the work. There are many connections to this song cycle with the circumstances of the composer's life. Still, we retain for the beginning that during the same period (1908-1909), Schoenberg publishes *Das Buch der Hängende Garten*, his first cycle of completely atonal songs (Lynch, 2014, p. 12). Alban Berg also wrote *Sieben Frühe Lieder* when he was under the tutelage of Arnold Schoenberg as a disciple – their collaboration influencing the compositional style of the work.

For understanding its piano writing, it is also relevant a detail: it is generally accepted that the work was originally written for voice and piano between 1905-1908 (shortly before the *Piano Sonata* op. 1) and later orchestrated by the composer. However, the version for voice and piano was published in the same year as the orchestral one – 1928. From the accompanist's perspective, we can easily see that the piano writing is sometimes not instrumentally fitted. That makes us consider George Perle's view (1980, p. 3): "Nor should one be misled by the data of 1907 that appears on the title page of what some writers have taken to be the original version for voice and piano of the *Sieben Frühe Lieder*, published in 1928, which is probably in fact mostly a reduction of the orchestral setting that received its first performance in that year." The necessity to reorganize the data of the pianistic score to ease the execution and achieve the expressive requirements of the music leads us to accept this opinion as being valid – although it seems to contradict that of Nicholas Chadwick, according to which the first audition of the voice and piano version of *Die Nachtigall*, *Liebesode*, and *Traumgekrönt* took place in a concert held by Arnold Schoenberg's students in November 1907. It is quite possible, however, that the text rendered in 1907 would not have remained unchanged until 1928, and the version known today to be the result of a review made after the orchestration of the work intervened in the meantime.

As far as the orchestral version is concerned, we point out two ideas. The first one belongs to Mosco Carner (1977, p. 83): he considers that the orchestration of this song cycle is not mere clothing of the music from outside, but a realization of its immanent symphonic nature. The second idea is equally impressive because of the performance hints it contains. Douglas Jarman (1979, p. 240) observes that "Berg imposed a symmetrical shape on the group

by scoring the third song for strings and the fifth for winds alone, the second and sixth songs for reduced orchestra and the first and seventh songs for full orchestra so that the whole set pivots around the central fourth song”. It is an extremely pertinent observation from the perspective of the symbolism of the whole cycle and its dedication. As we learn from the correspondence of the composer with Helene, during the composition of *Sieben Frühe Lieder*, he uses a quote from Rilke’s poem *Traumgekrönt*: “*The Day was almost frightening in its splendor, / The day of the white chrysanthemums...*” and he continues: “I have found the splendor of yesterday’s joy almost frightening. I have kissed you!” (Berg, 1971, p. 365) The theme of love is the essence of the song-cycle; the performers have the delicate task of expressing all the nuances of the sensitive sentiment it describes, in an inspiring and paradoxically thought-out manner.

Concerning the musical language, it is essential to highlight that Alban Berg never abandoned the idea of expressive vocal lines - both in these songs and later in the opera genre, no matter how much he explored the extended tonality zones. This stylistic tendency was obvious from the early years of his career. Lynch states (2014, p. 6): “when Berg first began studying with Schoenberg, Schoenberg was concerned that although Berg was gifted, he could apparently compose nothing but Lieder, declaring: *he was absolutely incapable of writing an instrumental movement or inventing an instrumental theme.*” The melody also remains the principal expressive coordinate in *Sieben frühe Lieder* – not only in the voice part but also in the piano part.

Still diatonic (although the first song, *Nacht*, oscillates between diatonism and hexatony), the songs exhibit an evolved motivic development starting from micro-structures - e.g., in *Liebesode* the piano develops a unique 3-note motif, and *Traumgekrönt* evolves from a single 4-note cell. From the pianist’s perspective, particularly relevant is the harmony; it is vital to understand the technique of harmonic progression through common notes developed initially by Schoenberg and then assimilated by Berg as a preferred way of linking seemingly distant tonal structures. The analysts of Alban Berg’s harmony observe a peculiarity of his early harmonic style, which they call “creeping chromaticism” (Mark DeVoto) derived from the technique of harmonic progression through similar notes already mentioned (De Voto, as cited in Lynch, 2014, p. 12).

Finally, a few words about the relationship between music and text: the doctoral thesis took as reference convincingly demonstrates the relationship between the symmetry of the musical form and the syntax of the text. However, without diminishing the importance of this connection, the few considerations that follow will also be made in the context of the laws of the musical performance itself, where music is seen as an autonomous semantic entity, as Schoenberg states in his essay *The Relationship to the text* (1950, pp. 1-6).

## 1. Nacht

*Dämmern Wolken über Nacht und Tal, / Nebel schweben, Wasser rauschen sacht. / Nun entschleiert sich's mit einemmal: / O gib acht! Gib acht! // Weites Wunderland ist aufgetan. / Silbern ragen Berge, traumhaft groß, / stille Pfade silberlicht talan / aus verborg' nem Schoß; // und die hehre Welt so traumhaft rein. / Stummer Buchenbaum am Wege steht / schattenschwarz, ein hauch vom fernen / einsam leise weht. // Und aus tiefen Grundes Dürsterheit / blinken Lichter auf in stummer Nacht. / Trinke Seele! Trinke Einsamkeit! / O gib acht! Gib acht! O, beware! Beware!*

Carl Hauptmann

### Night<sup>1</sup>

*The clouds grow dark overnight and valley, / Mists hover, waters rush softly. / Now it unveils itself suddenly: / O beware! beware! // A vast wonderland is opened. / Silver soar mountains, dream-large, / silent paths, silver-light, toward the valley, from the hidden lap; // and the majestic world so dream-pure / A silent beech tree stands by the path; / from the distant grove / a lonely breath softly blows. // And from the deep valley's gloom / lights twinkle in the silent night. / Drink, soul! Drink, solitude! / O, beware! Beware!*

The form of the song is structurally balanced: the **A** sections, placed at the extremes of the form (**A** / mm. 1-8, **Av** / mm. 26-39), are tonally indefinite sections. **B** section: mm. 9-15; **Bv**: mm. 16-25. The song has two related thematic profiles, equally developed throughout the work. Here is the structure of the piece - the thematic reiterations and transfigurations that help to build the performance process:

The theme of Section **A**:

mm. 2-5 – voice/*p*;

m. 5 its rhythmic diminution (sixteenths) as background level

m. 8 – piano/ *poco f, marc.*;

mm. 27-30 – piano / the theme's homophonic writing suggests the underlining of the soprano.

At the end of the song, we see the thematic echo/*pp, staccato-legato*, and the recurrence of the tempo marking slightly changed: *quasi Tempo I* - a strategy that ensures the unity of the song and the cyclicity of the form.

The theme of Section **B**:

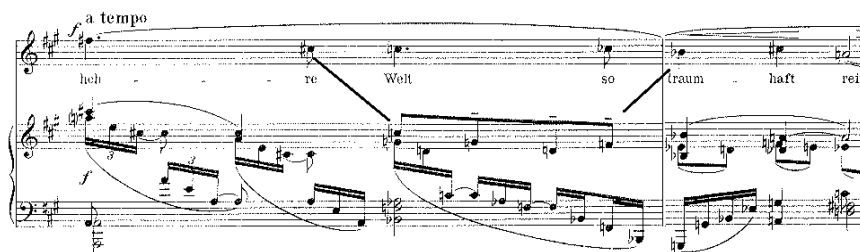


Fig. 1 Alban Berg, *Nacht*, mm. 16-17

The melodic line split between voice and piano; compare with mm. 9-10

<sup>1</sup> All song text translations are from George Bird and Richard Stokes, *The Fischer-Dieskau Book of Lieder* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1995) reprinted by permission of the authors in Lisa A. Lynch (2014).

Thematic variation in the piano interlude of m. 24 – *Ganz breit, pp*; rhythmic, timbral, and harmonic variation occurs in m. 33 (the *marcato* accents highlight the melodic structure *poco f* that appears in the piano part); music returns to the initial mood and sonority. Beyond the clear melodic outline, we can see the secondary, background level, consisting of hexatonic scale displayed in the medium register (mm. 19-22); they have a significant role in building the evocative feeling suggested by the title. The *p/pp* dynamics are always associated with this type of passages; similarly, the initial and final moments, which exploit the expressivity of the structure.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Alban Berg's 'Nacht'. The upper system features a vocal line in G major with lyrics: 'Nacht und Tal, Nebel schweben, auf - lept night, are hang - ing, ben, ing,'. The piano accompaniment is in the same key and includes a hexatonic scale in the medium register. Dynamics are marked as *ppp* and *pp*. The lower system continues the piano part, showing a hexatonic scale and dynamics *ppp*. The notation includes various musical symbols such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 2 Alban Berg, *Nacht*, mm.1-2; 37-38

In m. 2, the smooth rendering of the inner thirds – resonant through similarity with the vocal line – creates a timbral effect appropriate for the introductory mood. The soprano becomes prominent from m. 4; it has an anticipatory-melodic role for the second theme occurrence. To preserve the transparency of the instrumental timbre, we suggest releasing the attack of the harmonic structures in mm. 5-7/r.h. to maintain the fluency of the sixteenth notes placed in various registers.

After identifying the thematic structures and their avatars, it is possible to shape the phrasing. We can appropriately outline the long lines of the song by highlighting the stylistic traits of the post-romantic musical architecture: vocal and instrumental melodic arches extended over broad surfaces generated by the poetic

meanings, not by editorial suggestions expressed through conventional phrase arches.

The phrasing reveals itself from the evolution of dynamic indications: *p*, *mp poco a poco cresc.... f* – the culmination (m. 9). Recognition of thematic metamorphosis - e.g., the variation of the piano writing by transforming the thematic line into the background (componistic device also encountered to Cl. Debussy) also leads to semantic unification under the idea of phrasing. From this perspective, section A identifies with a single phrasing arch. In this context, special attention should be assigned to the piano-voice unison moments – mm. 13-15, where instrumental sonority requires a dynamic-timbral equilibrium with the voice; similarly, in areas where the metamorphoses of the writing occult semantic units – e.g., the last presentation of the theme / mm. 36-37, where the thematic line and the background level tend to melt in the zone indicated *portato* – interpretable both as the end of the theme and transfiguration of the accompaniment (oscillation on tone interval, see m. 2). In both cases, the performance requires agogic unity – rendering without significant *ritenuto*, even if the passage represents the end of the work. Furthermore, the *quasi Tempo I* indication may be considered a warning against any licenses resulting from not grasping the temporal structure.

The chromaticism – Schoenbergian influence – appears as discreet melodic insertions whose delicate but precise contouring provides an added consistency to the performance.



Fig. 3 Alban Berg, *Nacht*, m. 14 / l.h.

Often, in such moments, the writing has Debussy-like tint, the influence of the French composer being evident in the sonority and the piano writing. We offer some examples that require the highlighting of the melodic line inserted through the inner structure of the chords:

Fig. 4 Alban Berg, *Nacht*, mm. 15, 17, 20

In the previous examples, the Debussy influence is also visible in the differentiation of the touché inside the same hand, during the launching of melodic arches rendered by mixed contribution/right hand, left hand.

The piano's sonority oscillates between the impressionist tint of sections A Av and the intonational generosity of the melodic lines belonging to the central area. For the A sections, we suggest using subtle, slow attacks, rendered through the full flexibility of the piano apparatus action. The result would be a perfect acoustic continuity of the fluctuating entities that define the introductory and the final sections of the work. The pattern in which the writing of these moments falls is that of the compact, undifferentiated interior harmonic entities. Besides, there is a reverberant effect on m. 6, analogous to the passage indicated < > in m. 1. Moments involving similar acoustic treatment are: m. 25 – bass reiterations of the *e* note; final theme *pp*, *staccato-legato*/m. 35.

From a timbral standpoint, the song *Nacht* provides the opportunity for sensitive reflection of all the shades of the poem's semantics. The tonality *A* major, announced by the key, is only stated in m. 9 (after the theme's instrumental rendering through *portato/poco f*, *marc.* articulation by the l.h.). This is the first moment of brightness after the introductory bars of indecisive mood that correspond to the verses *Dämmern Wolken über Nacht und Tal, Nebel schweben / Twilight - clouds leaves in the valley, the fog is floating in the air*. To build the expression adequately, we observe that the title –*Nacht* falls in contradiction with the major tonality of the song, underlined by the brighter sound of sections **B**. Their bright tone corresponds to the ecstatic mood invoked by the *Wunderland* metaphor (*Weites Wunderland ist aufgetan. / A vast wonderland is opened*). Also, by the verse *Und die hehre Welt so traumhaft rein/the world is enchanting, pure*. The *f* dynamics appears in both areas. The text, apparently descriptive, hides a psychological dimension that has to be considered by performers. Similarly, the image described by the verse *Stummer Buchenbaum am Wege steht/A silent beech tree stands by the path*, could indicate metaphorically the author himself - left at the end of the poem in a solitary, contemplative posture: *Und aus tiefen Grundes Dürsterheit Blinken*

*Lichter auf in Stummer Nacht. Trinke Seele! Trinke Eissamkeit! /And from the deep valley's gloom, lights twinkle in the silent night. Drink, soul! Drink, solitude!* We suggest a slight *accelerando* on the section corresponding to the exclamative verse, associated with a slight *crescendo*.

Essential for the agogic-unified performance of the work is the continuity of the sixteenth's pulsation, present in the piano writing starting from bar 5, signifying the nightlife that permeates the tranquility of the landscape with a distinctive hum (*Wasser rauschen Sacht/waters rush softly*). We can also assume that in the context of the main topic of the song, the theme of love, this metaphor signifies the emotion born gradually from the initial contemplative mood, generated by deep layers located beyond the surface semantic level.

Some observations resulting from the comparison with the orchestral version: a visible aspect from the perspective of the orchestral score, but non-discernable in the piano writing, is the phrasing in mm. 11-12; the orchestral score shows the unity of the phrasing arch played by the oboe and the English horn. The piano writing creates confusion about the shape of the line. To avoid it, we suggest observing the *legato* extension on the note *C#* in the orchestral score – involving, pianistically, the realization of a similar *legato* articulation on repeated notes to smoothly continue the musical sentence.

The orchestral score also provides valuable suggestions for the rendering of the ascending piano passage that opens the **Bv** section (mm. 15-16); in the orchestral version, it is fully executed by the harp; in the piano part, it appears assigned to both hands. The acoustic unity of the moment, noticeable in the first variant, should give useful insights to the pianist.

The orchestral version clearly shows the last occurrence of the **B** section's theme, where the trumpet fully renders it (mm. 33-34); in the piano part, it is relatively difficult to notice it, although highlighted through the markings *poco f* and *marcato* accents. The sinuosity of the phrasing arch makes somewhat recognizable the melodic profile if carefully analyzed. A similar case is the last thematic occurrence (mm. 36-37) – unison executed by the harp and the woodwinds in the orchestral score.

The orchestral version offers additional coloristic and expressive suggestions. In the orchestral score, the triangle marks the beginning of the phrase through a tiny accent in m. 5 (the passage of flowing sixteenths); analogously, the bright timbre of the clarinet in *B flat* highlights the climax of the phrase arch on the note *B2*. Both moments should be underlined within the piano part too.

The gradual shading of the piano sound on the descending arch in mm. 17-18 corresponds, in the orchestral score, to the distribution of the melodic line to instruments with progressively dark sonority: trombone, cello, bassoon, and contrabassoon – a suggestive detail for the accompanying pianist.



Equally sensitive is the *pp* chord passage involving chromatic differentiation in the context of m. 20, which is played by the strings in the orchestral version; a similarly soft sonority should be rendered on the piano accordingly.

Finally, the bass line that unifies the Coda (after *Etwas zenehmend*) is indicated in the orchestral score through *crescendo* and *diminuendo* markings, aiming to highlight the relevant notes.

## 2. *Schilflied*<sup>2</sup>

*Auf geheimem Waldespfade / Schleich' ich gern im Abendschein/An das öde Schilfgestade, / Mädchen, und gedenke dein! // Wenn sich dann der Busch verdüstert,/Rauscht das Rohr geheimnisvoll,/Und es klaget und es flüstert,/Daß ich weinen, weinen soll.//Und ich mein', ich höre wehen/Leise deiner Stimme Klang,/Und im Weiher untergehen/Deinen lieblichen Gesang.*

Nikolaus Lenau

### *Song of the Reeds*

*By a secret forest path / I love to steal in the evening light, / to the desolate reedy shore / and think, maiden, of you. // Then when the wood grows dark, / the reeds rustle mysteriously, / lamenting and whispering / that I should weep, weep. // And I think I hear wafting / softly the sound of your voice, / and, drowning in the pond, / your sweet singing.*

Bi-strophic form, with an introductory section. **Introduction** – mm. 1-8; **A** section – mm. 9-19; **B** section – mm. 19-29. The agogic markings provide valuable formal hints - see the *Tempo II* marking, representing the beginning of the A stanza, although the fluency of the piano writing might suggest a faster tempo, without being affected the overall lyrical note.

The semiquaver – quaver formula unifies the whole work rhythmically and as expression. We find it in the piano part in different forms (the vocal part is built on its *cantabile* inversion); shaped in melodic or harmonic writing (m. 13); presented in various articulation: *staccato-portato*, *legato* (mm. 5-6, tenor, mm. 11 respectively); rhythmic variation – syncopated formula in the B section (mm. 19-22) and in the end / *Coda* (mm. 28-29). It migrates to all the voices inside the instrumental part, covering the average and low registers, becoming a kind of pattern for the entire work. The performer should ensure its correctness from the first exposure, where the rhythmic accuracy of the instrumental execution determines the similar spacing of the introductory notes in the vocal part. Along the way, we suggest using a manner of pedaling so to keep its profile distinct<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Lisa A. Lynch makes interesting associations between the text of this song, the legend of Pan, and the work of Cl. Debussy for solo flute - *Syrinx* (2014, pp. 39-40).

<sup>3</sup> Dave Headlam observes the stylistic link between the techniques used in the development of the rhythmic motif from *Schilflied* and the presence of the same technique in the late works of the composer (Lynch, 2014, p. 36).

We notice that, in the orchestral version, the phrase arches are more suggestive than in the piano-voice version; compare m. 9 in the piano part / l.h., with that of the double bass in the orchestral score. Also, the dynamic markings of the orchestral version are extremely accurate. Thus, in m. 24, the *mf* dynamic assigned to the contrabassoon (a high dynamic level, in the context) perfectly corresponds to the need to highlight the chords' fundamentals in the piano score.

The first musical phrase (mm. 1-9) – widely spread in the piano part, is more incredibly delineated in the voice and piano score than in the orchestral version. After the sequences that build up gradually (mm. 4-5), the culmination in m. 5 (natural *e*) needs to be emphasized harmonically as a significant moment of high syntactic density and large ambitus; from here on, we suggest emphasizing the melodic bass line. The sonority and dynamic level of the introductory section are indicated by the textual metaphor *Abendschein im / in the evening light*, placed on the climax in the introductory section.

The **A** and **B** sections are characterized in the piano part by delicate ornamentation that should be rendered at the surface of the instrument, in a *volando* touch type. The bass should temporarily underline the rhythmic formula in m. 12 / *poco f*, while the right-hand supports the momentary unisons with the vocal part and its climaxes (m. 18, m. 26), or some episodic chromatic lines (m. 16). There is also possible greater dynamic freedom to reflect the semantics of the text, such as a *subito p* on the verse *und es Flüstert/And Whispers* (m. 15).

The presence of short polyphonic moments are complementary to the vocal line; we suggest discretely highlighting them in context:



Fig. 5 Alban Berg, *Schilflied*, mm. 22-23

Considering the timbral differences between the horizontal layers, we see that the pianistic writing also contains latent polyphonic moments – easily detectable during an imaginative lecture, e.g., mm. 16-17, where the soprano voice *d flat – e – f* go upward towards the culmination. Simultaneously, the inner latent polyphony of the left hand amplifies progressively, *crescendo*, before the climax.

The performance must provide, overall, the impression of a delicate sonority, inflected by rare *rubato* moments, an impression conveyed mainly by the continuous and discrete keeping, along the way, of the sixteenth's background pulse. From this perspective can be decided the degree of the final *ritenuto*; the word *molto* placed between parenthesis is very suggestive. We think that only a slight slowing down of the tempo would be adequate; thus, the return to Tempo II would be natural (the entering into the general pulse of the piece).

We can achieve the architectural balance of the song by inducing a mood contrast – not only a tempo difference (see the *tranquillo* marking placed at the beginning of the B stanza). Also, we note that it is the pianist that renders the culmination of the song (m. 18).

### 3. *Die Nachtigall*

*Das macht, es hat die Nachtigall/Die ganze Nacht gesungen;/ Da sind von ihrem süßen Schall, / Da sind in Hall und Widerhall / Die Rosen aufgesprungen. // Sie war doch sonst ein wildes Blut, / Nun geht sie tief in Sinnen, / Trägt in der Hand den Sommerhut / Und duldet still der Sonne Glut / Und weiß nicht, was beginnen. // Das macht, es hat die Nachtigall / Die ganze Nacht gesungen; / Da sind von ihrem süßen Schall, / Da sind in Hall und Widerhall / Die Rosen aufgesprungen.*

Theodor Storm

#### *The Nightingale*

*It is because the nightingale / sang all through the night; / There from its sweet sound, / in echo and re-echo, / the roses sprang up. // She was once wild-blooded, / now she goes deep in thought, / carries in her hand her summer hat / and endures silently the sun's heat / and knows not what to do. // It is because the nightingale / sang all through the night; / There from its sweet sound, / in echo and re-echo, / the roses sprang up.*

The overall idea about the performance of this song depends on how we understand the meaning of the text. There are many possibilities. We can accept, or not, the variant suggested by Lisa A. Lynch, who cites Orlando A. Mansfield (2014, p. 51): “The Nightingale’s song is known for its «mournful character» and *Die Nachtigall* follows in this tradition. In Verlaine’s poem *En Sourdine*, a text set by both Fauré and Debussy, the nightingale’s song is described as «voix de notre désespoir» (...). The melodic gestures in the A sections of *Die Nachtigall* similarly evoke the despair of the nightingale’s song, with their large dramatic intervals and the increasing intensity of the motivic imitation.”

Nevertheless, why would we associate the song of the nightingale with the feeling of despair? The explanation is that Verlaine’s poem *En Sourdine* and, *mutatis mutandis*, Theodor Storm’s, is an anti-romantic poem, in which amorous encounters are only temporary, without future; at the fall of the night, the partners find their solitude, and their despair becomes painful when

accompanied by the nightingale's song ("Verlaine expliqué", 2019). However, given the deep feelings of the composer for Helene – to whom the work is dedicated –, we do not adhere to this interpretation. The performance hints that we propose privilege the positive meanings of the poem.

The sinuous melodicy of the song, edified on a contrapuntal background, unfold melodic lines that build expression on both levels: the whole cameral level and the piano level. The observation intends to calibrate the sonority on the timbral and dynamic coordinates in the piano part on the broad expressive lines of the work, corresponding to the sections **A** (mm. 1-15), **B** (mm. 16-26), **A** (mm. 27-40) + *Coda* (mm. 40-44). In this context, we notice the contrapuntal density accumulated in the climax zones - *stretto* areas made through the support of the thematic motif.

The image displays a musical score for Alban Berg's *Die Nachtigall*. On the left, a piano introduction is shown in 3/4 time, marked *weich und ausdrucksvoll* and *p*. The main score on the right features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "die Ro - - - - - sen auf - ge - sprun - - - - - gen / that bears a thou-sand ris - - - - - es." The piano part is marked *poco f* and features a complex, dense texture with overlapping melodic lines and a prominent arching figure. The tempo is indicated as *stretto*.

Fig. 6 Alban Berg, *Die Nachtigall*,  
m. 1 / the thematic motif, in the piano part; mm. 12-15, culmination in *stretto*

The thematic motif appears in a diversity of hypostasis, dependent on the associated expressive functions: in the **A** section, the simple melodic form is replaced by its presentation in octaves near the climax of the song. We note here the necessity of highlighting the soprano voice in half-notes, similar to the evolution of the vocal arch in mm. 12-15 and 36-39, respectively.

The quality of the pianistic sonority circumscribes mainly in the area of the expression marking *weich* (gentle, kind); significantly enough, the orchestral version opens the musical speech through the intimate, warm timbre of the viola. We suggest to the pianist the using of a soft *legato*, achievable by slow attacks, and a dynamic evolution that can be carefully controlled through a very flexible pianistic apparatus.

The short melodic interventions belonging to section B (played by the cello, in the orchestral version) have similar connotations – *Zart Betont*/very delicate (sensitive, gentle). The entire stanza requires the application of the soft pedal to create a veiled sonority, in contrast with the bright color of the extreme sections – indicated *Ausdrucksvoll* / eloquent. The timbrality of the piano part, achievable by lights and shadows, could be inspired from the comparison with the orchestral writing, which conveys the melodicy to the

strings in an extremely suggestive way - between the bright timbre of the violins and the warm and profound harmonics of the cello.

From the accompanist's perspective, it is also interesting to observe that the instrumental part holds its own indications of expression throughout the whole work – a peculiarity encountered in other song cycles of Alban Berg (e.g., op. 2). In this context, we believe that the intermediate section *Etwas Langsamer* can be performed not slower – as the score indicates, but a little bit faster, *only if* the dynamics in the piano part are soft enough and both performers create a shaded sound color appropriate for the state of indecision suggested by the personified text.

On the agogic dimension, we suggest a short *accelerando* before the final climax, which compensates the effect of *allargando*; this creates variation relative to the A stanza - with similar piano writing. The difference between the A A's sections is indicated by the composer through distinctive expression markings, corresponding to the function held by the thematic motif in each context: *portato* / m. 11 or accents / m. 36, to fulfill the culmination.

The polyphonic-imitative coda (*stretto* on the thematic motif) implies a unified sound concept that assumes the indication *a tempo* as an agogic landmark, which enrolls, conjecturally, a slight *poco rit.*

#### 4. Traumgekrönt

*Das war der Tag der weißen Chrysanthemem / mir bangte fast vor seiner Pracht... / Und dann, dann kamst du mir die Seele nehmen / tief in der Nacht. // Mir war so bang, und du kamst lieb und leise / ich hatte grad im Traum an dich gedacht, /du kamst, und leis' wie eine Märchenweise /erklang die Nacht.*

Reiner Maria Rilke

##### **Dream-crowned**

*That was the day of white chrysanthemums, / its splendor made me feel almost afraid... / And then you came to take my soul from me / at dead of night. // I was so afraid, yet you came sweetly, softly, / I had been thinking of you in my dreams, / you came, and soft as a fairy tune / the night sounded.*

Symmetrical bi-strophic form + Coda: **A** (a, b), **A'** (a', b') + **Coda** (A/mm. 1-15, A'/mm. 16-31, **Coda** /mm. 28-31).

Although the key is that of g minor, the piece is carried out in an ambiguous harmonic environment, perfectly modeled on the modernist text. The design of the main motif thoroughly suggests the dreamy atmosphere of Reiner Maria Rilke's poem. Lisa A. Lynch (2014, p. 63) pertinently notes: "The symmetrical structure of the motive points to Berg's use of symmetry in his later works—motive *a* spans a fifth between E ♭ and B ♭, with F ♭ a half step above E ♭, and A a half step below B ♭. The interval of a half step helps obscure tonality in these opening measures, and throughout the song."

This song beautifully illustrates the variational imagination of the composer on minimal thematic material. The thematic motif appears in a kaleidoscope of forms: vocal and instrumental, diminished, transformed from primary material into background level – a strategy also encountered in no. 1 *Nacht* (a compositional approach also used by his contemporary Cl. Debussy), and finally, placed in multiple registers.

However, there is also a secondary, linear thematic structure that initially appears in the vocal part (mm. 2-6). To clarify the dense texture of the song and facilitate the construction of the performance from a timbral standpoint, we propose the systematization of its appearances as follows:

- voice: **A** section, mm. 2-6

- piano:

### First stanza

**b** section: mm. 9-13, chordal presentation (r.h.) // orchestral version – violin I; mm. 12-14 (l.h., *portato* octaves) // orchestral version – trombone;

### Second stanza

**a'** section: mm. 16-23, melodic profile achieved by the contribution of both parties (as in *Nacht/No. 1*); orchestral version – flute, oboe + voice; this aspect suggests the continuous takeover of sonority between the chamber partners in the voice-piano version.

**b'** section: mm. 23-26, chordal presentation (r.h.) // orchestral version – violin I; mm. 26-28 (*portato* octaves); orchestral version – trombone;

**CODA** – thematic variation/m. 29.

We note the structural similarity of sections **b**, **b'**, as well as the instrumental thematic motives – that appear indicated *espressivo*. Section **A** (**A** stanza) is made up of the close interweaving of the main motif and their disconcerting mobility in the sonorous space. The effect obtained by the substantial similarity between the density of the musical writing and the multilayered semantic of the text gives the impression of ideas and emotions experienced at the subconscious level (Lynch, 2014, p. 68).

Fig. 7 Alban Berg, *Traumgekrönt*, mm. 1-8

For the last occurrence of the thematic motif, in the bass line, we suggest the execution of the *appoggiatura* on the beat, followed by the leading motif *legato* – musical meaning rendered by the orchestral writing, too (cello 2). The theme, presented in chordal context at the piano, requires highlighting the treble part *tenuto*, an articulation that would create a full *legato* arch; in the orchestral score, this line is assigned to the first violin, a suggestive choice from the *cantabile* mood required.

The background layer (a chain and overlapping of the thematic motives) involves delicate, perfectly smooth execution; a good fingering would allow the stability of the hand on the reiterated positions. The *non-espr.* marking suggests the flowing character of the passage in the orchestral version (m. 9). We recommend its diversified renderings in sections *a* (mm. 2-9) and *a'* (mm. 16-23) – e.g., a *crescendo* at the end of the *a* section, a *decrescendo* at the end of the *a'* section, corresponding to the sensitive meaning of the text; *a'*-*Mir war so Bang, und du kamst Lieb und Leise, / Ich Hatte Grad im Traum an dich gedacht. / I was so afraid, yet you came sweetly, softly, I had been thinking of you in my dreams.*

In the same section - *a'*, we note the inverse distribution of melodic lines (the voice takes over the initial passage of the piano, and the piano takes over the vocal line from the *a* section), as well as the instrumental dynamics situated below the vocal level, despite their thematic role. The expressive variation (not only a playful gesture in the writing area) is due to the poetic sense located on the subjective coordinate (*Mir war so bang, und du kamst lieb und leise! / I was so afraid, yet you came sweetly, softly*), not on a descriptive one, as happened in the first stanza (*Das war der Tag der weißen Chrysanthemen, / That was the day of white chrysanthemums*). The two characters of the poem can also explain why the tender melodic line is built by reciprocal changes between the voice and the piano, a line enriched throughout with new timbral reflexes.

For the sonorous consistency of the form, we suggest to slightly accelerate the tempo on section *b'*, to differentiate it from the similar section *b*. We also recommend strict adherence to the composer's indication for Coda: *a tempo*, any slowing down spoiling the unity of the final line, arched over the

richly ornamented background. The last two bars match – as dynamics and timbre – the chimeric mood evoked by the title: a dream.

### 5. *Im Zimmer*

*Herbstsonnenschein. / Der liebe Abend blickt so still herein./Ein Feuerlein rot / knistert im Ofenloch und loht.// So, mein Kopf auf deinen Knie'n, / so ist mir gut, / wenn mein Auge so in deinem ruht, / wie leise die Minuten zieh'n.*

Johannes Schlaf

#### *In the Room*

*Autumn sunshine. / Fair evening looks silent in / Red fire / blazing, crackling in the stove. / Thus, with my head on your knees, / thus I am content / my gaze reposed in yours, / as the minutes gently pass.*

The miniature *Im Zimmer* lasts less than 1 minute, intending to suggest the value of the temporality - who resides not in duration, but the quality of the sentiment. The state of intimacy has to be created starting with the first sound - see the marking *molto p* indicated in the piano part -, the subsequent cantability requiring the ability to support the phrase line in a long arch, with associated dynamic and timbral differentiation. We suggest rendering *legato* the bass line, simultaneously highlighting the soprano in mm.1-5 (A section). The middle stanza, which is delicately introduced after an unwritten caesura (necessary before the meter change), is fulfilled on the isochron semiquavers now invested with different expressive meanings. They anticipate the culmination, which represents the transfiguration of a similar previous passage:

The image displays two musical excerpts from Alban Berg's 'Im Zimmer'. The left excerpt shows the vocal line with the lyrics 'O - fen-loch und loht.' and the piano accompaniment. The piano part includes markings 'poco rit.' and 'p' (piano). The right excerpt shows the vocal line with the lyrics 'Wenn mein Au -' and the piano accompaniment. The piano part includes markings 'p' and 'cresc.' (crescendo). Both excerpts feature a boxed-in section of the piano accompaniment, likely indicating a specific performance suggestion.

Fig. 8 Alban Berg, *Im Zimmer*, mm. 8-9, 14-15

In m. 11, on the anacrusis indicated *mp*, we suggest a sudden change in color.

A' section could be rendered slightly slower than the first stanza, without any *ritenuto* along the way. The orchestral version simulates the time passing through *pizzicatos* performed by the cello (anticipated by the writing of the central part), which should be rendered with rhythmic accuracy because the text itself suggests this execution: *Wie leise die Minuten Zieh'n/How slow the Minutes pass*. In m. 17, we suggest a slight spacing of the fourth *b flat – e flat*,



against the dynamic background indicated *più p*. The moment circumscribes a closed world, where the two characters appear to exist beyond the time, despite the concrete meanings previously referred to.

Within the cycle, we consider that the dynamic ambitus and the distinctive mood of the song should be played considering the character of the pieces surrounding it, so that the entire cycle would create the impression of a construction having eloquent, fluent extremes (the no. 1, 2 and 6, 7) and a kernel defined by a timeless intimacy (no. 4, 5).

## 6. *Liebesode*

*Im Arm der Liebe schliefen wir selig ein, / Am offenen Fenster lauschte der Sommerwind,  
/ Und unsrer Atemzüge Frieden trug er hinaus / in die helle Mondnacht. // Und aus dem  
Garten tastete zagend sich ein / Rosenduft an unserer Liebe Bett / Und gab uns  
wundervolle Träume, / Träume des Rausches, so reich an Sehnsucht.*

Otto Erich Hartleben

### *Love Ode*

*Blissful in love's arms we fell asleep, / the summer wind watched at the open window, /  
and bore out the peace of our every breath / to the moon-bright night. // And from the  
garden, feeling its timid way, / a scent of roses to our love bed came, / and gave us  
wondrous dreams, / ecstatic dreams, so rich in longing.*

In a letter dated August 1909, Berg describes a beautiful day spent with Helene (1971, p. 79), where he includes the first verse of R. Maria Rilke's poem, from *Liebesode*: "Im Arm der Liebe schliefen wir selig ein / In the arms of love I fell asleep happily", continuing: "Such a day would be worth the most miserable, tormented life; worth death itself." The intensity of this confession gives clues about the emotion expressed in *Liebesode*.

As can be seen from the poetic text, *Liebesode* is the only song of the entire cycle in which the text does not have regular rhymes. The musical form reflects the free poetic structure. Although morphologically the piece is cyclical (we find the melodic fragment of mm. 2-4 transfigured in mm. 22-24), the song is unidirectional as expression (see the overall dynamic plan - *pp*, *poco cresc.*, *dimin.*, *pp*, *poco a poco cresc.*, *sempre poco a poco cresc.*, *molto f*, *ff* and the ascending parallelism towards the culmination area / mm. 13-24). The dynamic diagram of the song leads us to the form of the work, which could be summarized as follows: Introduction (mm. 1-4), **A, A'**.

We can assume the overall sonority of the piece from the orchestral version. The instruments predominantly used are those with warm timbre: violin, horn, harp.

The slow introduction contains one expressive structure, a chromatic cell rendered by both partners.

Sehr langsam (♩ = ca 46) rit.

Im Arm der Lie be schlie-fen wir se-lig ein.  
Embraced by love we bliss-ful-ly fell a sleep.

pp

Fig. 9 Alban Berg, *Liebesode*, mm. 1-4

Along the way, the piano uses it consistently by leveraging its expressive potentialities with ingenuity. Its inverted shape gradually edifies the music's architecture. The accompanying pianist must be extremely vigilant in the application of the pedal, to respect the profile of the right hand's motives (see the semiquaver breaks on the downbeats of each measure; the sonority of the motivic patterns should be well-shaped and not linked through pedaling).

The direction of the passionate resonant waves in the left hand is consistently anacrusic – corresponding to the motives in the r.h.; in the orchestral version, the harp executes them, and the dramatic tension always goes towards the second dissonant beat (thesis, in the structure of the thematic cell). The indication *Rauschen* – “shivering” that appears in the harp's part it is also suggestive. To achieve a perfect fluency in the piano part, we suggest that the fingering follows the structure of the pianistic positions, despite other suggestions generated by the score.

The interwoven of the melodic lines reflects the connotations of the poem (in the piano part, the r.h. / l.h. passages are always convergent, the musical sense merging towards the end of the sequences). However, the piano rendering requires simplification, for precision and instrumental convenience reasons; therefore, for an accurate *legato* rendering we suggest the consistent takeover of the binary cell from the end of the left-hand passages by the right hand (mm. 6-7, 9-12). For a perfect sound fluency (the ideal, tensed *legato* arch of the soprano), we also suggest applying the same technique in the introductory section:

Sehr langsam (♩ = ca 46) rit.

Im Arm der Lie be schlie-fen wir se-lig ein.

pp

Fig. 10 Alban Berg, *Liebesode*, mm. 1-4. The circled notes can be executed with the left hand

Observing the descriptive details that differentiate similar moments of the song, it is also useful; for example, if we compare measures 3 and 23, we notice the fermata, albeit short - *kurz*, on the final word - *Sehnsucht* / *longing*, a semantic landmark of the poetic text.

Finally, we insert a fascinating hypothesis belonging to the musicologist Robert Gauldin (Lynch, 2014), who would offer interesting interpretative suggestions: “Berg is known to have incorporated musical associations with significant people into his music, and he associated the key of D minor with his wife, Helene. While *Liebesode* is in F# minor, D minor features prominently in the song: it articulates the critical musical and textual shift at m. 5, as the music enters the realm of the «dream world» of the lovers. D is also emphasized as a dissonant note in the vocal line / m. 3, which in the new context of m. 5 becomes the tonal center. D minor reappears in mm. 18 and 20, on the text *wundervollen Träume* / *wondrous dreams*, just before the final cadential passage.” In the light of such a reading key, the broad emotional ambitus of the song, reflected by the dynamic *pp-ff* ambitus, creates various performance possibilities, where the artistic imagination, and especially the timbral one, can be freely expressed.

## 7. *Sommertage*

*Nun ziehen Tage über die Welt, / gesandt aus blauer Ewigkeit, / im Sommerwind  
verweht die Zeit, / nun windet nächstens der Herr / Sternenkränze mit seliger Hand / über  
Wander – und Wunderland. // O Herz, was kann in diesen Tagen / dein hellstes  
Wanderlied denn sagen / von deiner tiefen, tiefen Lust: / Im Wiesensang verstummt die  
Brust, / nun schweigt das Wort, wo Bild um Bild / zu dir zieht und dich ganz erfüllt.*

Paul Hohenberg

### *Summer Days*

*Now days move over the world, / sent from blue eternity, / in the summer wind time  
drifts away, / now at night the Lord twines / star-garlands with blessed hand / over  
wander- and wonderland. // O heart, what in these days / can your clearest wanderer's  
song then say / of your deep, deep pleasure: / in the meadow's song the heart is silent, /  
words cease, where image upon image / comes to you and fills you completely.*

The song *Sommertage* – bearing the character marking *Schwungvoll* (with momentum) – is the densest as writing, the most tensed as expression, and the most virtuoso lied of the cycle. It requires at the maximum the technical resources of both partners: the voice - whose singing style anticipates the vocality of the composer's later operas - and the piano accompanist's.

Aesthetically, the fluency of the work is ensured by the middle section, whose sonority on ternary rhythm dominates the piano writing. The intermediate culmination (mm. 16-21) is configured in three steps that could be successively edified through the insistence upon the *arpeggiato* chords of the left hand (mm. 16-18).

In the original score, we consider inappropriate the phrasing in mm. 23-25. We can find the correct phrasing in orchestral version:

Fig. 11 Alban Berg, *Sommertage*, mm. 23-25. Voice and piano version

Fig. 12 Alban Berg, *Sommertage*, mm. 23-25. Orchestral version, trumpet in F

The music appears saturated with dialogical structures, not only between the voice and the piano but also inside the pianistic part itself. All must be rendered with accuracy, amid the dense polyphonic writing. Lisa Lynch states (2014, p. 104): “The contrapuntal texture is more intricate than in *Traumgekrönt*, and almost every melody can be traced back to a few basic motives”; they are extracted from the dense writing and thoroughly explained by the author in their musical evolution.

From the agogics perspective, the unstable temporal areas and their relationship with the phrasing draw the attention: mm. 26-29 *a tempo, ma molto rubato* (*rit., accel., rit., accel., rit.*). However, even if the score allows us much agogic freedom, we think that the contour of the phrase is paramount; we suggest applying a creative agogics only in this context (e.g., the *rit.* marking may be equal to a slighter or longer duration of the notes indicated *portato*).

Concerning the concluding section, if we compare the orchestral and the voice-piano version, it can be seen the absence of the marking *Breit* in the former, on the very culmination of the song (m. 34) – a suggestive aspect, if considered by the performers of the voice-piano version. In the orchestral version, we also find an excellent interpretative solution for the ending of the song – we refer to the paradoxical moment *tenuto* octave (bass), combined with adjacent caesura and *subito p* marking. In the orchestral version, the last sound in strings’ part is marked *ff*, *senza diminuendo*. In the piano score, no

maximum intensity is assigned there, to avoid any aggressive attacks in the passage directed to the low register; we suggest a resonant, not forceful rendering. On the sound quality thus obtained, preserved by keeping the C key pressed, the pedal change becomes equal to a *caesura*. The final chord will, therefore, acquire an echo effect. Relative to this point, we mention the idea of Lisa Lynch (2014, p. 104), with aesthetic sense: “Following the *ff* cadence in C major in m. 35, the final *p* C-minor chord is eerie and unsettling, and suggests the dichotomy in all of the *Sieben frühe Lieder* between light and darkness, joy and sorrow.” The author insists on the idea in the context of the music-text relationship concerning the word *Lust*, in mm. 27-28: “Although *Lust* is translated as joy or pleasure, throughout the *Sieben frühe Lieder*, joy is colored by a sense of longing and even sorrow” (2014, p. 113).

The last lines of the text *wo Bild um Bild / zu dir zieht und dich ganz erfüllt / where images over images come to you and fulfill you* could be seen indeed as a poetic synthesis and summary of the whole cycle, not just of the *Sommertage*'s song (Lynch, 2014, p. 114).

## Conclusions

The performing conception of the *Sieben frühe Lieder* song cycle can acquire stylistic sense by understanding aspects related to the musical text: the biography and aesthetics of Alban Berg's creation, the semantics of the text, an overview of the logic articulation of the form. The listed elements generate justified interpretative variants if they are oriented by the sensitivity and musical thinking in the direction of discovering the profound musical meanings always involved in the performance of the art song works. It is only in such a way that earlier observations can make sense, and can be accepted the original opinion of Lisa Lynch that states: “Since Berg's music is inherently dramatic and full of expressive details, it makes all the more sense to consider performance as essential to an analysis of the *Sieben frühe Lieder*” (2014, p. 120).

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