

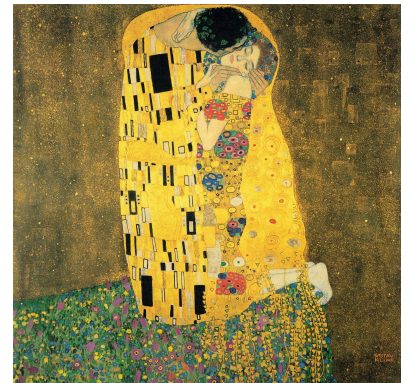
Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra
Beethoven @ 250
March 14, 2020 - 7:30 PM

***Transfigured Night* (1899)**
Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

It is always tricky and often presumptuous to try to tie a musical composition to a great composer's personal life. Sometimes the cheeriest, funniest compositions come during times of sickness or emotional stress. Is musical composition on a different plane of existence than ordinary life? Is the composer "self-medicating" by using the composition to distract or compensate for the travails of the quotidian?

Yet, it is widely reported that Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) was in the throes of love when he wrote the passionate *Transfigured Night* over three weeks of intense compositional efforts in 1899. His love interest was Matilde Zemlinsky, the sister of his colleague and, briefly, composition teacher, Alexander Zemlinsky. Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra audiences are familiar with Zemlinsky because IPO gave the North American premiere of his *Symphony in D-minor* at the Harris Theater in 2014.

The direct inspiration for *Transfigured Night* is the poem by that title (*Verklärte Nacht* in German) of Richard Dehmel (1863-1920). Dehmel was from a group of revolutionaries called German Symbolists and related to the pictorial movement called the Jugendstil (Young Style), similar to Art Nouveau. Observers sometimes associate the painting "The Kiss" by Gustav Klimt of the Vienna Secession movement as containing the eroticism and "transfiguration" of this poem. Dehmel's poems were collected in 1896 in a volume called *Weib und Welt* (Woman and World) whose eroticism threatened the conservative sexual morality of that time. Dehmel was tried for obscenity and blasphemy, and though acquitted, his book was ordered to be burned.



Dehmel's poems were set by Richard Strauss, Max Reger, Kurt Weill, and Alma Mahler as well as Zemlinsky, who may have introduced them to Schoenberg, who also set several. However, Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night* is not a setting of a poem but is one of the first examples of chamber music, rather than orchestral, "tone poem" where the music describes the events of the poem. Thus, the work doesn't follow the classical forms like "sonata," "rondo," etc. The original composition was for string sextet, but Schoenberg, far from disowning the work because of its tonal, late-Romantic sound world, transcribed it for string orchestra in 1917 and then revised this in 1943.

Though completed in 1899, the world premiere was on March 18, 1902, by the Rosé Quartet (whose leader Arnold Rosé had married Mahler's sister Justine[1]) supplemented by violist Franz Jellinick and cellist Franz Schmidt. Schmidt's participation may be a case of art over

ideology as he was also a “competing” composer of some renown though conservative, Catholic, and likely anti-Semitic—the Rosé family name was originally Rosenbaum. Surprisingly enough, Schoenberg was not able to attend.

Zemlinsky wrote him this remarkably frank report:

Apart from moments of considerable tedium and affectedness in the middle of the work, it made a great impression on me. There are passages of true beauty and deepest feeling as well as genuinely great, uncommon artistry! You really must revise the piece, publish the score, and try to disseminate it. [...] the success was just as you would have wished. Heartfelt, frequent recalls mixed with the opposition [...] Rosé had to take six bows.[2]

An original trial performance for the Vienna “Tonkünstlerverein” (Composer’s Society) for the 1900-01 season did not result in a public performance with member Richard Heuberger stating that it sounded like “someone had smeared the score of *Tristan [und Isolde]* by Wagner] while it was still wet.”

This brings us to the musical style, which genuinely combines the chromaticism of Wagner (using many tones and harmonies, not in the indicated key signature as well as internal changes of key) with the thematic economy and variation of Brahms. This is entirely in the late Romantic tradition and before Schoenberg had advanced to his epochal atonal and then twelve-tone modes of composition that came to dominate the 20th century along with the competing aesthetic of Igor Stravinsky.

The musical composition is divided into five continuously flowing sections relating to the five parts of the poem. But it takes some guidance to understand this because the Schoenberg exists in “musical time,” which is quite different from that required to read the poem. And his music expresses the emotions and psychology of the events, not word-by-word expressions of the verses. Indeed, Dehmel, at the premiere, wrote: “I had intended to follow the motives of my text in your composition, but soon forgot to do so, I was so enthralled by the music.” Enthralled or confused. But if even the poet, who thoroughly knows the story, wasn’t following along, it may be hard for the inexperienced listener.

I would musically summarize the piece as follows: Part I: Scene setting and expression of dread and apprehension of the woman who is walking with her love in the wooded moonlight. Part II: He senses her mood and encourages her to speak. She tells him the difficult, emotionally wrought news. (that before she met him, she, fearful of never being loved, had unloving sexual relations with a stranger to become a mother. Now she is in love with her companion but pregnant with the other man’s child.) Part III She walks forward, stumbling, afraid of what his answer will be. Part IV He still loves the woman and will help raise the child as theirs. (There follows a love duet.) Part V The night is transfigured by this love

Part I begins “Sehr Langsam” (very slow—the famous Mahler movement is “Adagietto. Sehr Langsam”) with a downward moving, minor-key, dirge-like passage. This reflects how the “scene-setting” of the night is based on the woman’s dread and apprehension—not woods and moonlight. About six minutes later, without pause is the major-key expansion (“Breiter” broadly) of the man encouraging her to speak. The following sounds of the reply are dominated by the lower strings with aggressive plucked passages, so it’s not the voice of the woman that we hear but the almost violent aversiveness of her story. This part is approximately 5 ½ minutes long. Part III (“Schwer betont” heavy, accented) is a shorter section expressing the woman’s stumbling away, doubting his answer. The dirge-like, opening, downward passages return here in full force. But this is a short section, only lasting about 2 minutes.

Part IV (“Sehr Breit und Langsam”) is remarkable in that the man replies with comforting, sustained sounds in what is like a holy choral hymn. The mood brightens with a beautiful, evocative, string-crossing passage, and there are many obvious humanized, lyric answers where the violin responds to the cello (there are solos even in the string-orchestra version) in an almost operatic duet. This passion seems to go far, far beyond a couple holding hands or kissing in the moonlight. This section lasts about 10 minutes. Finally, in the four-minute Part V “Sehr ruhig” (very peaceful), the night is transfigured, and the opening “dread” theme is transformed into major-key happiness combined with the previous love-duet passages.

In May 1901, Matilde found out that she was pregnant. She and Schoenberg were married in a Protestant Church in Vienna in October of that year despite their shared Jewish heritage. Did they live happily ever after? No! But that’s a subject for “later” Schoenberg notes.

Two figures pass through the bare, cold grove;
the moon accompanies them, they gaze into it.
The moon races above some tall oaks;
No trace of a cloud filters the sky’s light,
into which the dark treetops stretch.
A female voice speaks:
I am carrying a child, and not yours;
I walk in sin beside you.
I have deeply sinned against myself.
I no longer believed in happiness
And yet was full of longing
For a life with meaning, for the joy
And duty of maternity; so I dared
And, quaking, let my sex
Be taken by a stranger,
And was blessed by it.
Now life has taken its revenge,
For now, I have met you, yes you.
She takes an awkward step.
She looks up: the moon races alongside her.
Her dark glance is saturated with light.
A male voice speaks:

Let the child you have conceived
Be no trouble to your soul.
How brilliantly the universe shines!
It casts a luminosity on everything;
you float with me upon a cold sea,
but a peculiar warmth glimmers
from you to me, and then from me to you.
Thus is transfigured the child of another man;
You will bear it for me, as my own;
You have brought your luminosity to me,
You have made me a child myself.
He clasps her round her strong hips.
Their kisses mingle breath in the night air.
Two humans pass through the high, clear night.

—**Richard Dehmel**, *Verklärte Nacht* first published in *Weib und Welt* (1896)(S.H. transl.)

[1] Yes and we could fill several more paragraphs with the interconnections of the “personages” in fin siècle Vienna, for instance, the Quartet’s cellist, Eduard Rosé, married Mahler’s other living sister Emma

[2] Translation by Antony Beaumont.

~Charles Amenta, Board Member and Chair of IPO’s Artistic Committee

Clarinet Concerto (1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Mozart wrote his only concerto for clarinet and orchestra for his friend Anton Stadler in the space of about ten days, when he was at the height of his powers, and only two months before his tragically early death. In Mozart’s day, the clarinet was still quite a new instrument and was undergoing development by various makers. Mozart wrote for Stadler’s own instrument- a “Bass-Klarinett”. This was not the instrument we now know as a bass clarinet, but an extended normal clarinet, capable of playing the whole major third lower than the modern instrument. The concerto has survived not in Mozart’s manuscript, but in a set of parts with the clarinet solo was written for normal clarinet, issued in 1801 - ten years after Mozart’s death. It was published by the firm Johann Andre, who had bought all of Mozart’s surviving manuscripts from his widow, Constanza, in 1799. It is presumed, but by no means certain, that the arrangement for normal clarinet was by Andre himself. Despite its curious birth, this is a glorious work: the first great concerto for the instrument and some would say still the greatest. The solo part displays the range and agility of the instrument as well as its velvety and soulful qualities, particularly exploring the difference between the higher and lower registers. Notice how Mozart omits the

oboes and clarinets from the orchestra, in order to leave the middle woodwind register free for the soloist to exploit.

The first movement, in classical sonata form structure, is a wide-ranging and continuous melody. Although it is rich and varied in its ideas, the occasional chromatic passages and the soft phrase ending subtly impart melancholic character.

The outer sections of the slow movement are simple but warm and rich. The middle section, like the coda, is more elaborate for the clarinet, much of it in the lower register.

The rondo, based on the interplay of two melodies, provides a mostly high-spirited conclusion, yet moments of sadness still persist. It is amazing to think that, just nine weeks after writing this concerto, Mozart was dead.

~Notes by Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra

Symphony No. 1 in C Major, Op. 21 (1800) **Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

This is a young man's music. As the first symphony by the greatest symphonist who ever lived, one might expect clues of the daring and novelty to come; since it was written at the turn of the century and premiered in Vienna, the great musical capital, in 1800, one might assume that it is with this work that Beethoven opened a new era in music. But, in fact, this symphony belongs to the eighteenth, not the nineteenth, century; it honors the tradition of Mozart, dead less than a decade, and Haydn, who had given Beethoven enough lessons to know that his student would soon set out on his own.

The First Symphony is a conservative work by the least conservative of composers. (Just two years later, Beethoven proudly announced that he would follow a "new path.") Alexander Thayer, who wrote the first significant book on Beethoven, saw 1800 as a turning point in the composer's career: "It is the year in which, cutting loose from the pianoforte, he asserted his claims to a position with Mozart and the still living and productive Haydn in the higher forms of chamber and orchestral compositions—the quartet and the symphony."

It was a bold step for a young composer (Beethoven wasn't yet thirty) to write his first symphony when Haydn's final work in the form was just five years old and Mozart's Jupiter a scant twelve. But this was perhaps the best—and certainly the riskiest—way for Beethoven to stake his claim to their territory. Beethoven had moved to Vienna in 1792, the year after Mozart died, and in the famous words of Count Waldstein, he was to "receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands." Beethoven learned plenty from the example of Haydn's music, but the actual lessons he had with the master didn't go well, and Beethoven quickly understood that if he was to play a role in this great Viennese tradition, he would have to carve out a place for himself, all by himself.

Beethoven began to sketch a symphony in C major in 1795, and he was still struggling with it during a concert tour to Prague and Berlin the following year. But Beethoven apparently wasn't ready to reckon with this great form yet, and he turned his attention primarily to the piano sonata, which became the vehicle for his most advanced ideas. In 1799, the year he composed one of his real watershed works, the *Pathétique Sonata*, Beethoven decisively returned to the idea of writing a symphony. The C major symphony he finished early in 1800 is the first of eight he would compose in thirteen years.

On April 2, 1800, Beethoven held a concert in Vienna's Burgtheater, the first he would give for his own benefit in this opinionated and difficult music center. In a gesture of savvy public relations, he included a symphony by Mozart and two numbers from Haydn's *Creation* on the program to set the scene for his own music—some of it new, like the *Septet* that quickly became one of his most popular pieces, and this *First Symphony*. Sadly—inexplicably—the Viennese critics ignored the performance, but the Leipzig correspondent called it “truly the most interesting concert in a long time.”

Beethoven's *First Symphony* is scored for the orchestra of Haydn and Mozart, including the clarinets that weren't yet a standard feature, and written in the conventional four-movement form he would soon transform. Although it's a surprisingly cautious work from a bold and sometimes brazen composer, it's neither faceless nor unaccomplished (and the critics of the time found it neither timid nor derivative).

Beethoven begins, slyly, with the kind of cadences that normally end a work, stated in the wrong key—or, rather, searching for the right key. (Haydn had used a similar trick in his string quartets, but never to open a symphony.) Beethoven liked the effect so much that he did something comparable in his next work, *The Creatures of Prometheus*. The entire movement sparkles with genuine energy and is particularly colored by the brilliant and inventive writing for winds (one critic complained that “it sounded more like a wind band than an orchestra”).

The slow movement is charming and graceful; it is slight, as sometimes suggested, only by the composer's own later standards. Beethoven calls the next movement a minute, but both his tempo (*Allegro molto e vivace*) and a very swift metronome marking argue that this is really the first of his true symphonic scherzos. (Haydn had begun to write third-movement scherzos in his string quartets, but he didn't transfer that crucial development into his symphonies.) The finale, with its humorous slow introduction, is as playful and spirited as anything in Haydn. It is not yet the heroic or the revolutionary Beethoven, but it proves brilliantly that the student had learned his teacher's lessons well.

~Note by Phillip Huscher, program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Reprinted with permission. © 2020 by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association