

Schönberg - Pierrot Lunaire (Boulez) [1998]

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1. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 1 - 1. Mondestrunken 1:39 2. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 1 - 2. Colombine 1:38 3. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 1 - 3. Der Dandy 1:11 4. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 1 - 4. Eine blasse Wäscherin 1:24 5. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 1 - 5. Valse de Chopin 1:17 6. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 1 - 6. Madonna 1:53 7. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 1 - 7. Der kranke Mond 2:12 8. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 2 - 8. Die Nacht 2:09 9. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 2 - 9. Gebet an Pierrot 0:51 10. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 2 - 10. Raub 1:07 11. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 2 - 11. Rote Messe 1:46 12. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 2 - 12. Galgenlied 0:17 13. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 2 - 13. Enthauptung 2:09 14. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 2 - 14. Die Kreuze 2:12 15. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 3 - 15. Heimweh 2:07 16. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 3 - 16. Gemeinheit! 1:06 17. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 3 - 17. Parodie 1:20 18. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 3 - 18. Der Monfleck 0:54 19. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 3 - 19. Serenade 2:23 20. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 3 - 20. Heimfahrt 1:40 21. Pierrot Lunaire, Op.21 (1912) / Part 3 - 21. O alter Duft 1:32 22. Herzgewachse Opus 20 3:19 23. Ode To Napoleon Buonaparte Opus 41 16:21 Christine Schäfer – soprano, spoken word David Pittman-Jennings - baritone Ensemble Intercontemporain Pierre Boulez - conductor

Arnold Schoenberg claimed he had never set out to be a revolutionary. Yet the song cycle he wrote in 1912 based on proto-expressionist poems and featuring a grotesque harlequin figure, Pierrot Lunaire, still reverberates with its haunting, startling originality. This work introduced the world to a hitherto unthought-of musical landscape; to call it innovative would be an absurd understatement. What's particularly exciting about the undertaking here (Boulez's third recorded take on this music) is how utterly fresh the music sounds, its novelty unblunted and yet strangely beautiful--a far cry from the forbidding Schoenberg of stereotype. Soprano Christine Schäfer negotiates the no-man's land between spoken word and sung pitch--the technique known as Sprechstimme which Schoenberg introduced here--with fascinating nuance. She brings a cabaret-savvy sensibility to bear, along with a gripping sense of pathos, alternately sweet and acrid. Boulez treats the songs as miniatures, offering coloristic and multiperspectival--almost Cubistic--portrayals of Pierrot. For all the score's nebulous

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atmospherics, Boulez distills a keen, sharp clarity of line and timbre. Also included is the extraordinary song "Herzgewächse" (scored for harmonium, celesta, and harp), in which Schäfer matches her voice like a "crystal sigh" to the instrumentation. The album is filled out with Schoenberg's setting, during his exile from the Nazi horror, of Byron's bitterly ironic "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" for a baritone reciter. ---Thomas May, amazon.com

After the wrenching revolution Schoenberg brought to his music during the final years of the twentieth century's first decade (crystallized in such works as the Three Pieces for piano, Op. 11 and the Five Orchestral Pieces, Op. 16) the composer quickly drew back from the anguished Expressionism of these years to produce the much lighter Dreimal sieben Gedichte aus Albert Girauds Pierrot Lunaire (Three-times-seven Songs from Albert Giraud's Pierrot Lunaire, or, as it is known the world 'round, simply Pierrot Lunaire), Op. 21, of 1912 -- a cycle of 21 songs for voice and chamber group that, in the composer's own words, voices sentiments that are "Light, ironic, [and] satirical."

Pierrot Lunaire takes the shape of a single large melodrama in which the female voice gives the text a treatment that is midway between speech and song (the technique, called Sprechstimme, goes all the way back to Humperdinck, though it found its best use at the pens of the Second Viennese School composers). Three sections, comprised of seven songs each, showcase the five instrumentalists in all sorts of wonderfully colorful combinations as the narrator tells of the wandering Pierrot's experiences -- indeed, the contrasts offered by just the piano, violin, cello, flute, and clarinet are not enough for Schoenberg, who makes the violinist, flutist, and clarinetist double on viola, piccolo, and bass clarinet, respectively. Each of the 13-line poems is a rondel, the opening lines being repeated during the middle of the poem as a kind of refrain.

Structural and motivic connections abound throughout the work, and we find such devices as the recurrence of the queasy solo flute melody of No. 7, "The Sick Moon," in the 13th song, "Decapitation" (part of Pierrot Lunaire's admittedly darker second section, in which the demons of Expressionism come out to play once more), and the use of a passacaglia form in "Night," the first song of Part 2. By the time of "The Moonspot" in Part 3, Schoenberg has worked up to the level of a full double-canon (for the pair of woodwinds and the pair of strings). No. 19, "Serenade," is almost a virtuoso piece for cello and piano, while the final song of the melodrama, "O Ancient Charm of Fairy Days," is of the tender, epilogue variety. --- Blair Johnston, Rovi

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