

Notes on the Program

By James M. Keller, Program Annotator, The Leni and Peter May Chair

***Erwartung (Expectation)*, from *Vier Lieder (Four Songs)*, Op. 2, No. 1 *Erwartung*, Monodrama in One Act, Op. 17**

Arnold Schoenberg

Arnold Schoenberg spent the summer of 1909 in the Lower Austrian town of Steinakirchen, ostensibly on vacation. In fact, he kept busy composing, and during that summer he not only wrote his monodrama *Erwartung (Expectation)* but also completed his Five Orchestra Pieces (Op. 16) and the third of his Three Piano Pieces (Op. 11) — landmark works all. Devotees surrounded him, including the composer Alexander von Zemlinsky, who had become his brother-in-law when Schoenberg married Zemlinsky's sister Mathilde in 1901. Also passing through was Marie Pappenheim, a published poet who had just graduated from medical school. Although her specialty was dermatology, she was well versed in the recent advances in psychology proposed by Sigmund Freud. In 1895 Freud had published *Studies on Hysteria*, co-authored with Josef Breuer. Its famous chapter “The Case of Anna O” was, in fact, about a patient of Breuer's named Bertha Pappenheim, who seems to have been a relative of Marie's.

Apart from painting her portrait in oils that summer, Schoenberg asked Marie Pappenheim to write an opera libretto he might set to music. She consented to do so, left to visit friends elsewhere, and three weeks later returned with her libretto in draft form. Schoenberg would claim that he had spelled out the whole scenario for her and that she followed his instructions closely. Her account, related in a letter in 1963, was rather different: “I received neither directions nor hints about what I should write (I would not have accepted them anyway).”

In any case, her libretto did serve as the basis for Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, a monodrama in which a single character, a woman, wanders through a forest searching for her lover, who has deceived her, finally stumbling across his murdered, still-bleeding corpse. Schoenberg, however, removed from Pappenheim's libretto to language that suggested that the woman

In Short

Born: September 13, 1874, in Vienna, Austria

Died: July 13, 1951, in Los Angeles, California

Works composed and premiered: the song *Erwartung*, to a text by Richard Dehmel, was premiered August 9, 1899; premiered December 1, 1901, in Vienna, by tenor Walter Pieau with pianist Alexander von Zemlinsky. The monodrama *Erwartung* was composed August 27–September 12, 1909, with the orchestration completed on October 4 of that year, to a libretto adapted by the composer from a text by Marie Pappenheim; premiered June 9, 1924, at the Prague Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music, Alexander von Zemlinsky, conductor, with soprano Marie Gutheil-Schoder.

New York Philharmonic premieres and most recent performances: these are the first performances of the song *Erwartung*. The monodrama *Erwartung* was first performed November 15, 1951, Dimitri Mitropoulos, conductor, Dorothy Dow, soprano; most recently performed, June 11, 2011, David Robertson, conductor, Deborah Voight, soprano.

Estimated durations: the song *Erwartung*, ca. 3 minutes; the monodrama *Erwartung*, ca. 29 minutes

was herself the murderer. These references were particularly prominent at a point where the woman relives the moment of the murder: “blood on my hands,” “here he backed against the tree trunk,” “and then the shot.” Pappenheim was not pleased. She recalled:

One of these changes was for a long time very disagreeable to me — namely, deletions in the scene where she sees the dead body. With these deletions, which I have long forgotten, the mystical or, as it were, the hallucinatory quality became strengthened, while I was by no means sure that it was not a realistic occurrence. But perhaps the change made the overall effect more powerful after all.

As it stands, *Erwartung* seems to relate a dream — or probably a nightmare. It is a classic representation of Freudian hysteria. Its musical form is a stream of consciousness,

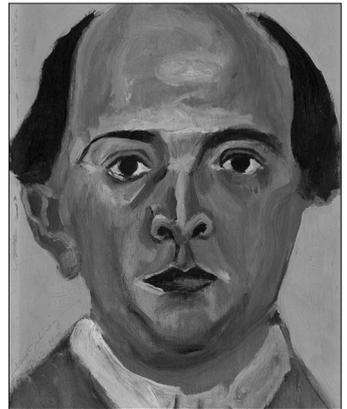
turning on a dime as it conveys disparate states of mind: anxiety, panic, revulsion, tenderness, lucidity, insanity. The work’s beginning and end seem almost arbitrary; one might just as easily have tuned in to a different segment of her experience. The woman plays only against herself, and the audience feels removed, captivated by her emotional, slow-motion train-wreck without necessarily feeling that it is sufficiently based in reality. *Erwartung* turns its audience into voyeurs.

The emotional intensity of *Erwartung* may well reflect what Schoenberg had experienced the previous year, when Mathilde had an affair with the painter Richard Gerstl and temporarily separated from her astonished husband. Before the year was out, Gerstl committed suicide in a fashion most grisly: having created a series of self-portraits that manifested escalating anguish, he destroyed all the artworks in his studio, stabbed himself in the chest, and then

Sources and Inspirations

Schoenberg wrote his monodrama *Erwartung* for a single singer, but for this production, director Bengt Gomér was inspired by an early Schoenberg song, also titled *Erwartung*, to incorporate it into a short prologue, with silent actors providing a dramatic set-up to the monodrama proper. (See “Tales of Darkness,” page 12, for more on this production.)

The song *Erwartung* was written about a decade before the monodrama, one of seven songs Schoenberg set to texts by poet Richard Dehmel. He had also used a poem by Dehmel as inspiration for the instrumental work *Verklärte Nacht* (*Transfigured Night*), composed in December 1899, four months after the song *Erwartung*. Like the later one-act work *Erwartung*, the narrative of *Verklärte Nacht* involves a walk in the woods, although by a couple who face a crisis and arrive at a hopeful ending. Schoenberg wrote to Dehmel in 1912:



Schoenberg self-portrait, 1910

Your poems have had a decisive influence on my development as a composer. They were what first made me try to find a new tone in the lyrical mood. Or rather, I found it even without looking, simply by reflecting in music what your poems stirred up in me. People who know my music can bear witness to the fact that my first attempts to compose settings for your poems contain more of what has subsequently developed in my work than there is in many a much later composition.

In the Composer's Words

In a letter to his composer colleague Ferruccio Busoni, written only days before he set to work on the monodrama *Erwartung*, Schoenberg shared some thoughts on the awareness of the unconscious mind, observations that seem relevant to the work at hand:

And the [musical] results I wish for:

No stylized and sterile protracted emotion.

People are not like that:

It is impossible for a person to have only one sensation at a time.

One has thousands simultaneously. And these thousands can no more readily be added together than an apple and a pear. They go their own ways.

And this variegation, this multifariousness, the illogicality which our senses demonstrate, the illogicality presented by their interactions, set forth by some mounting rush of blood, by some reaction of the senses or the nerves, this I should like to have in my music.

It should be an expression of feeling, as our feelings, which bring us in contact with our unconscious, really are, and no false child of feeling and "conscious logic."

hanged himself before a mirror he had used when painting his self-portraits. Although the essential situation that generated *Erwartung* — an extramarital affair, a violent death, the discovery of a corpse — seems like the stuff of a nightmare, it may have been rooted in biography. *Erwartung* is, as its composer described it, "the slow representation of things that go through the mind in a moment of great anxiety."

This performance opens with a song of the same title composed earlier by Schoenberg. The composer placed the piece at the head of his second published collection, the Four Songs (Op. 2), issued in 1903. The song *Erwartung* was among the first of Schoenberg's works to progress decisively beyond the somewhat Brahmsian mold of his teacher

Alexander von Zemlinsky. Its structure is clear: the relatively expansive central section is surrounded by first and last quatrains that are loosely symmetrical, the opening words of each being set to an identical melody, their accompaniment characterized by glistening, decorative arpeggiated figures. Although it is anchored in E-flat major, its harmonies strain against tonal boundaries; post-Wagnerian chromaticism intensifies the emotional climate, and one senses a tautness of expression that points to Schoenberg's future style.

The song was conceived for voice with piano accompaniment, but in this performance the piano part is transcribed for harp, an adaptation by Laura Stephenson and Staffan Lundberg that is perfectly suited to the music's diaphanous decorations and its overall spirit of placid anticipation. The song bears obvious relationship to the monodrama with which it shares a title. In this context it also connects with Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle*, certainly to the extent that the texts of both make much of metaphors involving specific colors.

Instrumentation: the song *Erwartung*, originally for voice and piano, is presented here in a transcription for voice and harp. The monodrama *Erwartung* is scored for three flutes (one doubling piccolo) and piccolo, three oboes and English horn (doubling oboe), three clarinets plus E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, four trombones, tuba, timpani, orchestra bells, xylophone, cymbals, bass drum, snare drum, tam-tam, ratchet, triangle, harp, celesta, and strings, in addition to the solo singer.

Supertitle translation of Richard Dehmel's Erwartung © James M. Keller

Additional notes on the production from dramaturg Magnus Lindman can be viewed at nyphil.org/concerts-tickets.

Bluebeard's Castle, Opera in One Act, Op. 11

Béla Bartók

Béla Bartók wrote only three works for the stage, all during the 1910s (with some revisions and orchestrations reaching later): the opera *Bluebeard's Castle* (1911, revised through 1918 and, to a lesser extent, beyond); the ballet *The Wooden Prince* (1914–16, orchestrated in 1917); and the pantomime *The Miraculous Mandarin* (1918–19, orchestrated in 1924). Since each is of modest length, they could be presented as an evening-long trilogy. Such an extravaganza would confirm that something elemental binds these works together, that they document the composer's exploration of an underlying theme: how human interactions play out in the darkest recesses of intimacy.

Bartók was at heart a humanist but he was not an optimist, and the first and third items in his trilogy are somber to the point of anguish. In *Bluebeard's Castle*, a duke is pressed by his curious bride to allow her to look behind the seven locked doors in his castle; in so doing she gradually discovers the secrets of what makes him tick, but behind the final door she finds imprisoned his three former wives and is doomed to join them in captivity. In *The Miraculous Mandarin*, thugs force a beautiful girl to lure men so they can rob them, and they end up assaulting a suitor who survives their violence, only to expire in the girl's arms after he has satisfied his own lust. *The Wooden Prince* stands as a sort of central respite among the three, offering a contrasting moment of hopefulness in this landscape of emotional desolation. Bartók's composer colleague Zoltán Kodály recognized this when he observed that

the constructive energy of the music [of *Bluebeard's Castle*] becomes even more evident if we hear *The Wooden Prince*

immediately afterwards. The playful mobile *Allegro* of the ballet serves to balance the desolate *Adagio* of the opera. The two works fit together like two movements of a huge symphony.

Bartók turned 30 when he achieved *Bluebeard's Castle*, and his compositional voice had come to reflect a sequence of youthful experiences and influences: his education at the Budapest Academy of Music; a fascination with the music of Liszt, Wagner, Strauss, and Debussy; and an abiding absorption in Hungarian folk music. His reputation as a composer was advancing haltingly, but he had great hope that his opera might be a breakthrough. The libretto,

In Short

Born: March 25, 1881, in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary (now Sînnicolau Mare, Romania)

Died: September 26, 1945, in New York City

Work composed: 1911–18, revised prior to publication in 1921, and slightly retouched in 1936; libretto by Béla Balázs

World premiere: May 24, 1918, in Budapest, Hungary, by the Budapest Opera, Egisto Tango, conductor, with soprano Olga Haselbeck, baritone Oszkár Kálmán, and Imre Palló, speaker

New York Philharmonic premiere: December 11, 1969, István Kertész, conductor, with mezzo-soprano Olga Szonyi and baritone Andras Farago

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: March 22, 2011, Esa-Pekka Salonen, conductor, mezzo-soprano Michelle DeYoung, baritone Gábor Bretz, and Richard Easton, speaker

Estimated duration: ca. 59 minutes

drawn from a fairy tale by the 17th-century French writer Charles Perrault (via Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Ariane et Barbe-bleue*), was prepared by Béla Balázs, a symbolist poet, novelist, and dramatist who shared Bartók's aspiration to create a stage work that was at once thoroughly modern and thoroughly Hungarian, a work that would prove irresistible to the Hungarian National Opera (a.k.a. Hungarian Royal Opera or Budapest Opera). Hopes for the piece came to naught when Bartók submitted it to a national competition for one-act operas, only to have it deemed unplayable by the jury, a judgment that the decision-makers at the Hungarian National Opera echoed.

Bartók, who was preternaturally disposed toward bitterness, essentially withdrew from the world of composition and performance, retreating into the making of ethnomusiological recordings. During World War I he again began to produce compositions, mostly folk-song arrangements, although this was also the time of his Second String Quartet and *The Wooden Prince*, which the Hungarian National Opera had asked him to write. The ballet scored a great success at its premiere, in 1917, spurring the company to finally present *Bluebeard's Castle*. To hedge its bets, it was unveiled on a double bill with *The Wooden Prince*, wisely, since the opera's darker spiritual landscape

The Work at a Glance



Duke Bluebeard and Judith, in an 1862 illustration by Gustave Doré

Symbolist plays and operas never display a particularly forthright narrative, but *Bluebeard's Castle* is even less opaque than many such pieces of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. The original story unfolds as Duke Bluebeard has just married Judith and is showing her his home for the first time, but not before giving her two chances to back out of their relationship, both of which she refuses.

Seven locked doors surround the chamber in which they stand, and Judith insists that her new husband give her the keys to each in succession. He tries to dissuade her, but Judith will not be deterred. As she makes the rounds of the doors, she finds within them symbols of different aspects of Bluebeard's mind — or soul, or character. As she makes her tour, blood seeps from everywhere, including the interior walls of the castle (and some productions have explicitly designed the set to resemble the interior of a skull: they are inside Bluebeard's head).

Behind the first door she finds instruments of torture. The second door reveals articles of warfare, the third a trove of jewels, the fourth a garden, the fifth a panorama of Bluebeard's land-holdings, the sixth a lake of tears. After much insistence, Judith is given the key to the seventh door, behind which she finds Bluebeard's three former wives. Bluebeard introduces these mute figures as the loves of his dawns, noons, and evenings, and reveals that Judith, the most beautiful of them all, is now to be the love of his nights. She joins the other three and Bluebeard locks them all into their chamber, remaining alone in the hall of his castle.

proved considerably more challenging to viewers and critics, who received it with mixed enthusiasm.

Instrumentation: four flutes (two doubling piccolo), two oboes and English horn, three clarinets (two doubling E-flat clarinet and one doubling bass clarinet), four

bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), four horns, four trumpets, four trombones, tuba, timpani (two players), bass drum, snare drum, tam-tam, cymbals, triangle, xylophone, celesta, organ, two harps, and strings; in addition to the soprano and baritone soloists also, offstage, four trumpets and four trombones.

About This Edition

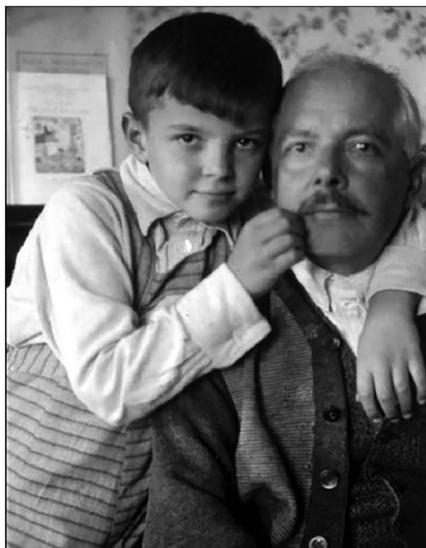
These performances of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* use the 2007 edition published by the composer's son, Peter Bartók, who compared all surviving manuscripts of the work and then made informed judgment calls on the ambiguities inherent in their differences. His version differs from the former standard edition through alterations to the music and the Hungarian text. Many of the new edition's departures involve small details that are not likely to change one's experience of the opera in a fundamental way, though it is obviously better to get things right than not.

But one issue looms large: the Bard's Prologue, a spoken poetic text that is often omitted in performance. He insists:

The prologue is an essential part of the opera, as it contains the key to understanding the symbolic message. Its original text explains that the legend is but a frame for presenting our lives and their relation to others.

When the text is omitted, Bartók believes, it is not surprising that it becomes a story of murder. In the preface to his edition, he argues that the Bard's Prologue makes clear that

rather than what is on the stage in front of us, we should examine the stage within us, in our own lives. The Bard's Prologue starts out by asking the question: where did this happen, outside or within? ... In the second stanza the bard is more specific: "The curtain of our eyelids is raised. Where is the stage, outside or within?" By the fourth stanza he leaves no doubt: we tell our own tales to each other. So we will be presented an ancient fable and we are directed to apply it to our own lives.



Peter Bartók with his father, in 1932

NOTES FROM THE DRAMATURG

Magnus Lindman drafted notes on this production of that were published in the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra program for its performances in January 2019:

Two composers of the same age, both steeped in the traditions of late Romanticism, each compose a one-act opera, in each of the capitals of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. Arnold Schoenberg found himself in Vienna in 1909 and Béla Bartók in Budapest in 1911. Around that time, the ideas of Sigmund Freud had many disciples in both of these cities. Marie Pappenheim, the librettist for Schoenberg's *Erwartung* (*Expectation*), would go on to found the Society for Sexual Counseling and Research with Wilhelm Reich. She may even have been related to Bertha Pappenheim, the first case of hysteria that Sigmund Freud came into contact with, whom he referred to as Anna O. Béla Balázs, the librettist for Bartók's only opera, *Bluebeard's Castle*, moved in Budapest's intellectual circles, where psychoanalysis and Marxism were hot topics of discussion. It is therefore not too much of a stretch to look at and compare these works through a psychoanalytical lens.

In the mid-1880s, the young Freud was permitted to visit Professor Jean-Martin Charcot's demonstrations of hysterical patients at the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. Medical students there were allowed to observe women who displayed a wide variety of symptoms that were difficult to pin down. Freud had previously come into contact with hypnotherapy as a way of attempting to cure neuroses. His work with the hysteria patients subsequently led to his theory of psychoanalysis, which, as Freud expressed it, was based on the notion that "the ego is not master in its own house."

This insight had subversive consequences for nascent modernism in art, literature, and music. The new master of the house was the unconscious. So the fact that houses lie at the core of both of these narratives is an occurrence that seems to be more than mere coincidence. In *Erwartung*, the house lies in a clearing in the forest that the woman finds her way into in the dead of night. In *Bluebeard's Castle*, everything relates to a building, the castle itself. In *Erwartung*, the house has windows and a balcony — there might be someone inside, looking out. In *Bluebeard's Castle*, the doors are symbolic.

Balázs called his libretto *Bluebeard's Castle*, not *Duke Bluebeard* nor *Judith*. Even the title shows that the castle itself lies at the center of the narrative. He stated that "my ballad is the ballad of the inner life. *Bluebeard's Castle* is not an actual castle made of stone. The castle is his soul." Although it's clear that the woman in *Erwartung* is potentially a patient, in *Bluebeard's Castle* the roles are not so clear-cut. And if the opera is in fact about Bluebeard's soul, then the role of Judith really ought to be that of an analyst, and Bluebeard the analyzed. But she has been given the name Judith, which in turn generates associations with the Bible story of Judith, who cuts off the head of Holofernes. In his essay *The Taboo of Virginity*, Freud analyzed this story and arrived at a complex picture of how a woman after "deflowering" can experience both a dependence on and a hostility towards the man, resulting in an unconscious desire for revenge. Is this why Judith wants to force Bluebeard to open all the doors? Is it in fact Judith who is the criminal?

And what about the woman in *Erwartung* — is she the main suspect in a case of murder or manslaughter? Is that a tree trunk or a dead body she has found? If it is a body, how did she know where it was? The title of this work is not as clear-cut as that of *Bluebeard's Castle*. *Expectation* — of what? Expectation, anticipation, is normally seen as a positively charged word. But the language of this opera could have been taken directly from the statement of a bewildered suspect during and interrogation. It is also similar to the language of a patient during an hour of psychoanalysis, inconsistent and incomplete, as it circles around the heart of the trauma.

Schoenberg's own description of *Erwartung* was that the work aims "to represent in slow motion everything that occurs during a single second of maximum spiritual excitement." But this doesn't only apply to its content: the music was composed relatively quickly, in just over two weeks. Only a few weeks later, an extremely dense instrumentation for large orchestra was also completed. The musical material is just as associative, just as illogical as the libretto. There is nothing for the listener to hang onto, nothing is repeated — each musical gesture evaporates the moment it comes to our ears.

Erwartung is one of Schoenberg's first experiments in atonal music — what would later lead to 12-tone technique, a method of musical composition that in its own way would come to be just as subversive an effect as psychoanalysis. A quick glance at the last measures on the last page of the score shows a black swarm of chromatic scales in 32nd notes — it seems impossible to believe that this is the end. One's first impulse is to turn the page. But of course, it's blank. Are there pages missing here? But if we go back, we see that there is actually a double bar line after these rapid scales. The music literally runs into a double bar brick wall.

With Bartók, nothing is improvised. The music follows the story with minute precision. The content of the different rooms behind each of the doors is evoked with an elaborate circle of fifths and different timbres. The thematic material also contains *leitmotifs*, recurring themes, which bind the narrative together. Here, one is reminded that Richard Strauss was the young Bartók's greatest inspiration. The music fits well with Balázs's poetry. This is not some kind of stream of consciousness — on the contrary, the libretto is written in an archaic octometer that is very common in Hungarian folk poetry. The subject matter is taken from Perrault's French folktale *Barbe bleue* (*Bluebeard*). In contrast to the fragmented language of *Erwartung*, in *Bluebeard's Castle* the repressed is given voice through ancient symbols and images.

"In here?" is the first line of the libretto in *Erwartung*. While in *Bluebeard's Castle*, the first words one hears are: "Here we are now." Once Judith has induced Bluebeard to open all the doors, he utters his final words: "My best and fairest! Henceforth all shall be darkness, darkness, darkness." The woman in *Erwartung* says at the end: "It is dark — your kiss like a burning ember in my long night." One can make a great deal out of the excess of imagery in these operas. But if there is one thing that psychoanalysis teaches, it is that there is no truth, only layer upon layer of interpretations, if not to say speculations. Freud himself could be tempted to psychoanalyze historical personages, works of art, and works of literature. He wrote a text about psychoanalysis for an encyclopedia in which he offered these words of wisdom:

Finally, one can only characterize as simple-minded the fear which is sometimes expressed that all the highest goods of humanity, as they are called — research, art, love, ethical and social sense — will lose their value or their dignity because psychoanalysis is in a position to demonstrate their origin in elementary and animal instinctual impulses.

Freud is talking here about psychoanalysis as a science. Without entering into that debate, it is also worth pointing out that it arose out of male, if not patriarchal, fantasies. But also that, just like art, psychoanalysis still has something to say in response to the eternal question of what it is to be human.