

---

## Es ist ein Flüstern in der Nacht



Title	Es ist ein Flüstern in der Nacht for Tenor and String Quartet
Time of origin	1893/94
Premiere	8 April 1967, Denton, University of North Texas
Duration	ca. 2 min.

Schönberg stated that he had a distant relationship to his early works in a 1931 radio broadcast: "What I wrote as a young man was a preliminary stage, and deficiencies are mainly discernible because I know how to say it better now."

In fact, his compositional work prior to 1900 presents a decidedly heterogeneous picture; completed pieces stand beside a multitude of fragments – a history of performance is evidenced for only a few pieces. In his early work, Schönberg's path seems open in all directions, scarcely indicative of a musical visionary with, perhaps, the exception of the little-known ensemble piece *Es ist ein Flüstern in der Nacht* ["A Whispering in the Night"]. He took the words from Theodor Storm in the anthology *Deutsche Lyrik der Gegenwart* ["Contemporary German Lyric Poetry"], published in Leipzig in 1884; it was the source of other settings of poems dating from the mid 1800s.

The scoring for tenor and string quartet seems to anticipate the last movement of his *String Quartet No. 2*, op. 10, but the piece is hardly a part of that traditional genre; it is an expanded art song, similar to many arrangements of works by Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert.

At the outset, a regular accompaniment supports 16th-note figures in the first violin, an image of Nature, perhaps depicting the wind wafting in the night. A forte eruption is followed by a turbulent middle section which soon leads back to the opening calm. After entering fortissimo on F#, the tenor voice climbs higher and higher as the dynamics increase until it reaches high B natural ffpp [fortissimo subito pianissimo]. The 16th-note figures return in the cello in the final bars, whereupon the music rather surprisingly subsides.

In view of its great technical demands, the piece is little suited for the repertoire; however, the vocal tour de force was to have its counterpart in *Herzgewächse*, op. 20 (1911). *Es ist ein Flüstern in der Nacht* evinces the composer seeking expressive values which, many years later, he masterfully translated into sound.

Eike Feß | © Arnold Schönberg Center, Wien  
[www.schoenberg.at](http://www.schoenberg.at)