
Mahler: Gesellen-Lieder (Arr.)

Title	Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen von Gustav Mahler
Time of Origin	1920
Premiere	6 February 1920, Wien, Konzerthaus
Duration	ca. 18 min.

1. Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht
2. Ging heut' morgen übers Feld
3. Ich hab ein glühend Messer
4. Die zwei blauen Augen

Although it is difficult to determine precisely when the “Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen” (Songs of a Wayfarer) were composed, they were probably written during Mahler’s employment in Kassel between the end of 1883 and the beginning of 1885. There are several reasons for the uncertainties in dating: on the one hand, it is unclear whether Mahler wrote the texts himself, based on poems from “Des Knaben Wunderhorn” or on a collection of poems by the writer Rudolf Baumbach that was popular at the time; on the other hand, text editing and composing, as well as an orchestral and a piano version, were partly written in parallel. Mahler supposedly used naïve folk poems, some of which were perceived as banal by a disapproving contemporary bourgeois and enlightened audience. Although these “humoresques,” as Mahler later characteristically called his songs, tell of the suffering of a lover wandering abroad – in a clear reference to Schubert’s “Winterreise” – they contain sadness and joy, sentimental emotion and bitter irony in a multifaceted and often disturbing juxtaposition. The fact that between such contrasts in the work neither an imposed causal logic nor psychological means of justification are allowed to develop prevents the relegation of the folk style to a mere representation of an artificial “natural beauty.” The constant reworking of musical material was a conscious strategic move for Mahler, who was also suspicious of solutions that were too single-minded and provided a seamless fit: the two versions (of four songs each) that he published in 1897 differ not only in instrumentation (one is for voice and piano, the other for voice and orchestra), but also in important compositional details. In other words, this is not a work completed in short score and orchestrated afterwards, but rather a composition that caters to the specific needs of the respective ensemble – and in this way has a significant effect on the entire structure of the work. At the time Gustav Mahler wrote his “Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen,” Schönberg, who was fourteen years younger, was still at school and just making his first attempts at composition. It is possible that the almost boundless admiration Schönberg later developed for Mahler both as an artist and a human being was the reason he prepared the chamber version of the “Gesellen” Lieder 35 years later and despite some divergences in artistic outlook. The premiere of

Schönberg's chamber version took place on February 6, 1920, at the 43rd concert of the "Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen" (Society for Private Musical Performances). For the most part, practical considerations dictated that orchestral works presented in the Society were performed in versions for one or two pianos, with Schönberg usually delegating other arrangements to his students. Mahler's extensive orchestral work, which according to Schönberg was not orchestrated but rather "invented for orchestra," was to be transcribed in a version for ten instruments. For the arrangement, Schönberg did not produce a new score, but rather entered his sound images directly into the notes of the first edition. He thus marked the existing parts with the new instrument designations, whereby the keyboard instruments harmonium and piano, for instance, often took over the wind and harp parts for practical reasons. Nevertheless, the overall impression is never one of a mechanical approach: the character of each individual part is shown to be differentiated and portrayed in a flexible manner, oftentimes leading, for example, to delicately shaded instrumental changes within a single melodic line. Due to the reduced number of instruments, the thematic and motivic fabric of the composition comes more pointedly to the foreground and thus illustrates Schönberg's claim of an "almost unprecedented objectivity" and economy in Mahler's soundworld. The chamber version of the "Gesellen" Lieder is hardly a reinterpretation of the work; rather, it was Schönberg's intention to transfer the original sound without loss into a more sparse instrumental environment. In his memorial speech for Mahler in 1912, Schönberg had already self-confidently recognized how one comes closest to a role model when one strives to be with oneself, as it were, in the other person: "The successor moves onward not only in terms of content, but also in terms of intensity, always expanding the heritage to a corresponding degree. This heritage compels, but it is imposed only upon those who can bear it."

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