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## Four Songs, op. 2



Title	Four Songs for Voice and Piano, op. 2
Time of origin	1899/1900
Premiere	11 February 1904, Wien, Festsaal des Niederösterreichischen Gewerbevereins 26 January 1907, Wien, Ehrbar-Saal
Duration	ca. 12 min.

1. Erwartung
2. Schenk mir deinen goldenen Kamm
3. Erhebung
4. Waldsonne

The song collections opp. 1–3, which were published for Schönberg by the Dreililien-Verlag in 1903 and 1904, were probably all composed before 1900, and they were not conceived as song cycles. They have one thing in common; their dedication to the mentor, friend and brother-in-law Alexander von Zemlinsky: Zemlinsky is the one “to whom I owe most of my knowledge of the technique and the problems of composing,” remarked Schönberg in 1949 in “My Evolution.” It was Zemlinsky who acquainted the autodidact Schönberg with the inner life of the music of Brahms and Wagner, to which the four songs which Schönberg later gathered under the opus number 2 also bear witness. Until about 1897, the composer stood under the influence of Brahms (from whom, in his own words, he learned to preserve “economy but nevertheless abundance”), and until 1899 increasingly under that of Wagner (from whom he learned how the use of an extended harmonic spectrum could lead to “the permutability of themes”). The musical structures include motivic “linkage techniques” (Heinrich Schenker), full chords, chains of thirds and sixths as well as massive octaves in the bass, on the one hand, as well as almost orchestrally employed tremolo sounds, or the expansion of harmonic combinations that are achieved by the use of chromatic alteration, on the other.

Schönberg’s development was also stimulated significantly by the literary models for his compositions. In 1897, a year after the publication of Richard Dehmel’s collection of poems “Weib und Welt” (“Woman and World”), the composer first set the poem “Mädchenfrühling” (“A Maiden’s Spring”) to music; for three of the Lieder op. 2 that he composed during the following years, he also used poems by Dehmel and supplemented these with the setting of a poem by Johannes Schlaf. When Richard Dehmel described the strong impression that a performance of Schönberg’s “Verklärte Nacht” (“Transfigured Night” also inspired by a poem from “Weib und Welt”) in December 1912 had upon him, the latter answered: “Your poems have had a decisive influence on my development. Through them I was compelled for the first time to seek a new lyrical tone. Or rather,

I found it without seeking, simply by reflecting in music what your verses stirred up in me" (13 December 1912). In particular Dehmel's linguistic density in the representation of colors inspired Schönberg to search for a new "tone": Quite similarly to Kandinsky more than ten years later in "Über das Geistige in der Kunst" ("Concerning the Spiritual in Art"), in the poem "Erwartung" ("Expectation") – set by Schönberg as the first song of this collection – Dehmel for example juxtaposes the "antithetic" color values red (as "warm and intensive") and green (as "passive and calm"), or black (referring to a "dead oak" – associated by Kandinsky with the stillness of death) and white (in connection with "pale moonlight" – described by Kandinsky as a stillness that contains the possibility of change). Schönberg attempts to reproduce the psychic effect of the slight variations in the described colors and their relations with a subtly coloristic tonal language, for example at the beginning with the suspended chords at the beginning – they later recur in an altered state – and their harmonic resolution that is ornamented by arpeggios. Within the collection, chords often seem to be stripped of any function in relation to the tonic; using incomplete cadences, a slowing of the harmonic tempo, or chord repetitions, the idea of sounds as "structure-forming" color values (Walter Frisch) is conveyed. At the same time, as in the poems of Dehmel, the musical setting is subject to strict, often symmetrical structural relationships.

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