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## Verklärte Nacht [Transfigured Night], op. 4



Title	Verklärte Nacht [Transfigured Night], op. 4
Time of origin	1899
Premiere	18 March 1902, Wien, Kleiner Musikvereinsaal
Duration	ca. 28 min.

"Yesterday evening I heard your 'Transfigured Night', and I should consider it a sin of omission if I failed to say a word of thanks to you for your wonderful sextet. I had intended to follow the motives of my text in your composition; but I soon forgot to do so, I was so enthralled by the music" (Richard Dehmel to Arnold Schönberg, 12 December 1912). Arnold Schönberg composed his op. 4 in just three weeks in September 1899, while vacationing in Payerbach at Semmering with Alexander Zemlinsky and Zemlinsky's sister Mathilde, who would become Schönberg's first wife. The final version of the manuscript is dated 1 December 1899.

This program music that "restricts itself to sketching nature and expressing human emotions" (Schönberg) uses as its literary model Richard Dehmel's poem "Verklärte Nacht" from the collection "Woman and World" ("Weib und Welt"), published in 1896. Before the First World War, Dehmel was one of Germany's most highly regarded lyric poets. His principal work, "Two People: A Novel in Romantic Verse" ("Zwei Menschen. Roman in Romanzen," 1903), addressed the themes of eroticism and sexuality within the context of the stylistic ideas of art nouveau (Jugendstil).

The previously published "Verklärte Nacht" also stands at the beginning of the first chief section of this "novel", in this case without a title. It expresses the "pathos of a new, anti-bourgeois sexual morality [and] the idea of an all-conquering Eros that shuns every convention" (Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt). The five verses of the poem sketch in sections of clearly contrasting content: A forest scene with two figures (Nos. 1, 3, 5); the words of a woman who loves one man but is expecting a child from another, and who thus reproaches herself (No. 2); the words of the man, who comforts the woman and accepts the child as his own (No. 4). Dehmel's poem drew upon an autobiographical episode, insofar as it alludes to his liaison with Ida Auerbach, whom he met as she was already carrying a child by her husband, Consul Leopold Auerbach. In the context of the upper-class Jewish family, the daughter played an essential role in the constellation Stefan George – Richard Dehmel – Arnold Schönberg: George would elaborate upon his unspoken love for such a daughter in his autobiographically composed "Book of the Hanging Gardens" ("Buch der hängenden Gärten"), and Arnold Schönberg would later set fifteen poems from this work to music as his op. 15.

It seems that Schönberg was fascinated by the genre of program music during the year that preceded the composition of his fourth opus, as indicated by the fragmentary compositions "Hans in Luck" ("Hans im Glück"), "Death of Spring" ("Frühlingstod"), and

"Blind Corner" ("Toter Winkel"), also a string sextet. His blossoming relationship with Mathilde Zemlinsky in 1899 may also have been decisive in his choice of text for the program of op. 4.

In its overall form, "Verklärte Nacht" represents a conjunction of two developmental trends in the music of the late 19th century: the inclination towards the one-movement sonata (Franz Liszt's Sonata in B minor stands as historical model) and the one-movement symphonic poem. The formal structure in Schönberg's op. 4 by and large adheres to the literary model, whereby the narrative sections (the forest scenes) and internal episodes (direct discourse) are developed in a form that approximates a rondo. The first part, in dense motivic work and epic gesture, presents an image of the clear moonlit night, which in the second part experiences a "dramatic outburst" through the confession of a tragedy (the first theme is linked to the previous section in D minor), as Schönberg explains in his "Program Notes" to "Transfigured Night," published in 1950. Clearly set off by a fermata, a second theme in B-flat minor that illustrates the unhappiness and loneliness of the woman follows. A third theme in C minor elucidates the compulsion for fidelity; after the woman has "finally obeyed her maternal instinct, she carries a child from a man she does not love. She had even considered herself praiseworthy for fulfilling her duty towards the demands of nature." This section of Dehmel's poem is expounded by a fourth theme in E major, which in its further elaboration quotes motives from previously heard material and leads to a distinct caesura. The following contrasting, homogeneous passage with new tonal shadings serves a transition to the third formal section, which again takes up the main motif of the opening and formulates it further in the style of the 'developing variation' technique established by Johannes Brahms.

In the fourth part, the modulation to "D major, the key with the utmost contrast" depicts the speech of the man "whose magnanimity is as sublime as his love." The muted strings employ harmonics to express the "beauty of moonlight" with a new tonal character. According to Schönberg, this episode "reflects the mood of a man whose love, in harmony with the splendor and radiance of nature, is capable of ignoring the tragic situation." The fifth section assumes the function of an all-encompassing coda based not only on the opening motive, now transformed to major (and as its counterpoint the principal theme of the fourth section), but also on thematic components of the third section.

Near the end of 1939, the American publisher Edwin F. Kalmus approached Schönberg with the proposal to publish a new edition of "Verklärte Nacht." The latter agreed to a new edition in an arrangement for string orchestra on the condition of an improved edition (changes in dynamics, phrasing, etc.). As early as 1917 the composer had prepared a version of op. 4 for string orchestra with a supplementary part for contrabass for Universal-Edition (the first known performance of the work in this form took place in the Leipzig Gewandhaus on 14 March 1918), but the experience of numerous performances had persuaded him to reshape this version as well. When the contract with Kalmus failed to materialize, Schönberg approached Associated Music Publishers in New York. The modifications in the arrangement for string orchestra (which was issued by AMP in 1943) concern primarily dynamics and articulation, but also tempo markings. In a letter of

22 December 1942 Schönberg describes the significant improvements over the edition of 1917: "The new version [...] improves the balance between first and second violins on the one hand, and viola and cello on the other, and restores the balance of the original version of the sextet with its six equivalent instruments."

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