
Five Orchestral Pieces, op. 16

Title	Five Orchestral Pieces, op. 16
Time of origin	1909
Premiere	3 September 1912, London, Queen's Hall
Duration	ca. 16 min.

1. [Vorgefühle]
2. [Vergangenes]
3. [Farben]
4. [Peripetie]
5. [Das obligate Rezitativ]

Schönberg spent the summer of 1909 in Steinakirchen bei Amstetten with his family, Alexander Zemlinsky, Alban Berg, Anton Webern and Max Oppenheimer. The summer holiday proved to be very productive for him; apart from the Five Pieces for Orchestra op. 16, which he had begun to compose in May (the fair copy of the full score was completed on 11 August), he also wrote the third piano piece of op. 11 and the expressionistic monodrama "Erwartung," op. 17.

Prior to completing op. 16, on 14 July 1909 Schönberg wrote to Richard Strauss, who had asked for orchestra pieces for the Berlin Hofkapelle concerts: "They are short orchestra pieces (between one and three minutes long), not cyclically related. I have finished three of them, a fourth will take at most a few days, and perhaps two or three more will be born later [...] I am nevertheless expecting colossal results, especially in terms of sound and mood. That is all they consist of: absolutely not symphonic – precisely the opposite – no architecture, no structure. Merely a bright, uninterrupted interchange of colors, rhythms and moods."

Schönberg did not consider giving the pieces programmatic titles until the Leipzig publisher C. F. Peters requested headings when the work was printed in 1912.

Schönberg's entry in his diary for 28 January, 1912 records that "On the whole, I don't favor the idea – the wonderful thing about music is that one can say everything so that people in the know understand it, and yet one has not divulged one's secrets, those that one confesses to one's self. But titles reveal them."

The first edition of the full score was finally published without the titles Schönberg had suggested (I. Vorgefühle – "Premonitions," II. Vergangenes – "Yesteryears," III. Akkordfärbungen – "Chord Colorings," IV. Peripetie – "Peripeteia," V. Das obligate Rezitativ – "The Obligatory Recitative"). After the world premiere (3 September 1912 in London, conducted by Sir Henry Wood) and another performance under Schönberg's baton, he decided to revise the work, which was then heard for the first time on

7 December 1922 in the Leipzig Gewandhaus; he made another revision, an arrangement for reduced forces, in 1949.

"Every glance can be expanded into a poem, every sigh into a novel." – Arnold Schönberg's preface to the Bagatelles op. 9 by his student Anton Webern (which he paraphrased with the terms "gesture" and "sigh of relief") at the same time describes the language of his own compositions at the beginning of that stylistic period which "dispenses with a tonal center" (Schönberg, "Rückblick"): in particular, the works from this time include the Three Piano Pieces op. 11, the Five Orchestral Pieces op. 16 (1909), the Three Pieces for Chamber Orchestra (1910), and the Six Little Piano Pieces op. 19 (1911). "The foremost characteristics of these pieces in statu nascendi were their extreme expressiveness and their extraordinary brevity. At that time, neither I nor my pupils were conscious of the reasons for these features. Later I discovered that our sense of form was right when it forced us to counterbalance extreme emotionality with extraordinary shortness." (Schönberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones").

The new structural conception of music as a reactive measure to long-established schemata and formulaic repetitions corresponds with the stylistic ideals of Expressionism: as Anton Webern summarized in a lecture of 1932, the goal is "to arrive at a different point in every work – each work is something different, something new". In musical terms, the expressive tendency towards consolidation applies just as much to the works as totalities as it does to the elements within these, and ultimately to the individual pitch sequences: the "working with tones" apostrophized by Schönberg. The musical texture's inherent expressivity is achieved by the decentralization of the consonance as well as the annulment of an orientation upon central pitch and cadence; the individual moment is thus intensified, so that repetitions and analogies can increasingly be avoided.

The immediacy of the musical events leads not only to the dissolution of traditional formal principles, but also to a re-examination of formal unity in the traditional sense, now only partially recognizable or as a reminiscence – such as in "Vorgefühle," the first piece of op. 16. The main sections of this orchestral miniature constitute an "exposition field" as well as an "ostinato that unfolds like a development" (Michael Mäckelmann); these are followed by a reminiscence of the "exposition" that can only remotely be described as a recapitulation and finally a coda.

The contemplative nature of "Vergangenes," the second piece, forms the greatest possible contrast to the unruly full-orchestra ostinato in "Vorgefühle"; here the expressive development is governed by a most delicate shaping of lines.

The third of the orchestral pieces – renamed "Farben (Sommermorgen am See)" (Colors – Summer Morning by a Lake) in an arrangement by Schönberg's son-in-law Felix Greissle that was published in 1925 – places the tone-color progression as the "imagination of an atmospherically fulfilled moment" (Reinhold Brinkmann) at the center of its poetic expressivity, and the perpetual motion of a particular chord at the center of its formal development. Each of the three internal sections of "Farben" emerges from a differently orchestrated sequence of chords oriented on an initial chord that is repositioned in a gradual progression.

The fourth piece, "Peripetie" (which Theodor Adorno called a "demonic scherzo"), absorbs the contrasting effect of the overall conception in terms of dynamics, orchestration, position, timbre, motivic content and tempo into the work's microstructure, sharply juxtaposing small building blocks – comparable to hard edge painting.

"Das obligate Rezitativ" exemplifies the concept of "tonal speech" (with no resemblance to a recitative in the traditional sense): following a lecture on 22 January 1912, Schönberg noted "one states the inexpressible in free form" in his "Berliner Tagebuch." He further discussed the idea of "elaborated" or "unending" recitatives as variants of the "obligatory." The syntax of the last piece from op. 16 is asymmetric throughout, the form atectonic, the melodic disposition athematic. Great weight is given to the dynamic accentuation of significant individual pitches. Schönberg later classified the stylistic criteria of this tonal speech as being "musical prose."

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