
Suite, op. 29



Title Suite for Piano, Piccolo Clarinet, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Violin, Viola, and Cello, op. 29

Time of origin 1925/26

Premiere 15 December 1927, Paris, Grande Salle Pleyel

Duration ca. 38 min.

1. Ouverture. Allegretto
2. Tanzschritte. Moderato
3. Thema mit Variationen
4. Gigue

The first drafts of the Suite op. 29 date from the fall of 1924, when Schönberg projected a series of cheerful movements in his 5th Sketchbook, to which he assigned the following - partly encoded - attributes: "1st (movement) 6/8 light, elegant, brisk, bluff / 2nd Jo-Jo Foxtrot / 3rd Fl. Kschw. Waltz / 4th AS Adagio / 5th IbeB Muartsch Var / 6th Film Dva / 7th Tenn Ski". The cheerful, vibrant character of the suite which was completed on May 1, 1926, is certainly a reflection Schönberg's attitude towards life at the time. He was newly married and dedicated the work to his "dear wife" Gertrud, whose musical monogram "eS-G" (E flat-G) is interwoven into the musical events at the beginning and end of each movement. The four-part suite, in which elements of old tonality are incorporated into dodecaphony (for example in the references to the song "Ännchen von Tharau" in the third movement), combines three movements of the traditional baroque suite with a set of variations on a song.

In a manner similar to several movements from the earlier piano compositions op. 23 and 25 as well as the Serenade op. 24, dance-like rhythms dominate, whereby especially the first two movements use elements of the dance music of the 1920s. The unusual scoring with its affinity to the reeds section of a swing band – three clarinets, string trio and piano – contributes to this feeling. However, the special attraction of the Suite originates in the tension of the relationship between its cheerful character and the rigidity of its musical structure. The work is based on a twelve-tone row whose final group of four tones is a transposed retrograde form of the first group of four tones, while two groups of two tones are arranged in a mirror relationship in the middle group. Both hexachords consist only of semitones and thirds; the first hexachord comprises the triads of E flat major and B minor, and the second hexachord the triads of C sharp major and A minor. Schönberg also worked other "degrees of relationships" into the row's structure that demonstrate supreme artistry in the handling of a – at the time new – method of composition.

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