
Accompaniment, op. 34



Title	Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene, op. 34
Time of Origin	1929/30
Premiere	8 April 1930, Frankfurt am Main, Südwestfunk (Radio)
Duration	ca. 9 min.

For its anniversary celebration, the Magdeburg-based publisher Heinrichshofen commissioned composers to write pieces that could be used in movie theaters. Since at that time movies were filmed without sound there was usually no music specifically composed for them, especially since smaller cinemas were normally only equipped with pianos to accompany live screenings. Instead, so-called “cue sheets” were issued: these were collections of musical snippets for different moods and emotions that could be freely combined with any kind of film. Schönberg was apparently inspired by this precise compositional structuring of emotional states: a handwritten note outlines evocative situations under the generic terms “danger – fear.” The numbered list begins with “quiet – calmness (calm before the storm),” moves on to “the danger approaches” and to “the danger leads to catastrophe,” and concludes in a conciliatory manner with “the parties concerned breathe a sigh of relief.” A note at the lower right-hand corner that reads “Lessingtheater | Cyankali” alludes to the much-discussed and controversial play “Cyankali” by Friedrich Wolf, which deals with the so-called Abortion Law, paragraph 218 of the criminal code. The premiere took place on September 6, 1929, at the Lessingtheater, although Schönberg likely attended a subsequent performance. Another note from the estate of Gertrud Schönberg confirms that points 1 – 9 trace the plot of an imaginary film version of the play, whose ending was changed in favor of a conciliatory conclusion. In the orchestral piece composed for the Heinrichshofen publishing house, the dramatic moments cited can be perceived in the captions “Threatening Danger – Fear – Catastrophe.” Schönberg never established a connection to the play “Cyankali.” While preparing for the premiere, Schönberg discussed with Otto Klemperer the possibility of producing an “abstract film” to accompany the music. The conductor suggested working with László Moholy-Nagy, an artist active at the Weimar Bauhaus. Although he considered the possibility of a collaboration, Schönberg was unwilling to jeopardize the integrity of his work, especially since he knew how to fulfill the specific requirements of music for the cinema. The “Begleitungsmusik” ties in with programmatic tone poems such as “Verklärte Nacht,” op. 4, and “Pelleas und Melisande,” op. 5, and links the practice of using leitmotifs to provide thematic identity with the unifying possibilities of the twelve-tone method. Recurring melodic figures underscore the dramatic development of the work through constant changes of sound color. Different themes contain audible similarities due to their derivation from the same twelve-tone row. The numerous musical references within a relatively short time span make the “Begleitungsmusik” one of

Schönberg's most accessible works. It exemplifies the exceptional versatility of the twelve-tone method, which can be effective in very different compositional contexts depending on a composer's aesthetic aims.

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