
Phantasy, op. 47



Title	Phantasy for Violin with Piano Accompaniment, op. 47
Time of origin	1949
Premiere	13 September 1949, Los Angeles, Assistance League Play House
Duration	ca. 9 min.

At the suggestion of the violinist Adolph Koldofsky, Arnold Schönberg, who had emigrated to the USA in 1933, composed a "Piece for Violin Solo with Piano Accompaniment" in March 1949, parallel to the choral works "Dreimal tausend Jahre" [Three times a thousand years] and "Israel Exists Again." That the soloistic character of the violin that the title implies is to be taken literally in terms of concept and hierarchical position is evidenced by the compositional process, which can clearly be determined by the manuscript sources: Schönberg first wrote out the complete violin part (completing it on 22 March 1949) before finishing the piano accompaniment a week later. For the first performance, on the occasion of his 75th birthday on 13 September 1949, Schönberg wrote an alternative ending for Koldofsky, who performed the piece and whom the composer regarded as an ideal interpreter.

In Schönberg's book "Structural Functions of Harmony," the fantasy as a genre was ranked among the 'so-called free forms,' characterized by its opulent figuration, instrumental improvisation and spontaneous expression. Schönberg's dodecaphonic Phantasy has points of contact with its classical and post-classical forebears in that the technical demands can certainly be compared to Schubert's Violin Fantasy in C major and the formal disposition to Mozart's Fantasy in C minor, K. 475. As has already been pointed out in other publications, the kaleidoscopic sequence of mutually interrupting sections that exists in Mozart's work can also be recognized in Schönberg's piece. The formal structure of Schönberg's Phantasy allows us to suspect an underlying major/minor mode of thought, as do the harmonic regions it explores, although these are based upon a dodecaphonic foundation. The weighting of rhythmical and metrical components in the music also indicates this and, additionally, the outline of a single-movement reprise structure within a sonata cycle is perceptible.

In schematic terms the Phantasy can be seen as consisting of four parts: a motif-forming section with transition (the main idea of the work is six bars long), a Lento section that could be compared to the slow movement of a sonata, a scherzando passage and a coda. The four parts are all linked by transitional passages. The Phantasy undeniably possesses a tone that reminds of the Viennese classic; the expressive aesthetic of the work is nourished in places by dance-like triple meters for which counterparts can be found in violin writing from Schubert to Mahler. The technical variety of the delicate soundscape ranges from doublestops of extremely large intervals, glissandi, pizzicati and harmonics to complicated tremolo effects and dynamically differentiated chord arpeggios.

