
Weihnachtsmusik



Title	Weihnachtsmusik
Time of Origin	1921
Premiere	probably in 1921, Mödling, among family members
Duration	ca. 6 min.

This piece was likely intended for private music-making among family members or friends celebrating the Christmas season. There are at least two reasons for this supposition. The first involves its instrumentation. The second pertains to its content: the echoes of bitonality and quotations from folk songs are rather unusual musical choices for Schönberg, who at this time was advancing towards the twelve-tone method. However, this piece goes far beyond the usual form of a chorale arrangement. The Protestant congregational hymn “Es ist ein’ Ros’ entsprungen” is combined with the melody of the popular song “Silent Night,” which has Catholic origins. Due to their temporal distance, the songs are worlds apart stylistically. Schönberg, however, achieves a balance between the two through the use of contrapuntal techniques and the interplay between the main key of C major and the secondary key of F major. After an extensive introduction and development of the older song, the more recent one finally appears approximately halfway through. “Silent Night” is treated polyphonically, with the melody undergoing a remarkable transformation between the two contrasting tonalities. There is further contrapuntal elaboration before safely returning to the home key of C major at the very end of the piece.

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