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## ‘Tierisch Unmittelbarer Ausdruck’: Analyzing Timbre in Schoenberg’s *Sprechmelodie*

### ABSTRACT

#### Background

Arnold Schoenberg shows a specific interest in tone color in both his *Harmonielehre* (1910) and *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (1937–48). In the first text, he refers to the ‘Tiefe’ of chords, which is the *depth* created by adding dissonances whose absence results in a cold, dry, expressionless affect. In the second text, he notes limitations of- and expressive differences between high, middle, and low vocal registers — e.g., he considers the highest register ‘vulnerable’ but effective for creating a climax if used carefully, the middle register as convenient albeit incapable of extreme expression, and the lowest register as stronger than the middle, but that it should not to be ‘overburdened’ with dramatic expression. His use of *Sprechstimme* as a means of emotional expression in his melodramas significantly parallels these writings. Even early in his career, Schoenberg’s awareness of timbre as a compositional tool is evident in his *Three Piano Pieces* Op. 11 (1909) and *Fünf Orchesterstücke* (1909); however, he also suspected that listeners might not engage with this facet of music. He emphasized the importance of moving away from the constructed elements in music (e.g., theme, harmony, form) in favor of direct artistic expression by more abstract means. During the same period, he ended *Harmonielehre* by reiterating the importance of timbre without offering solutions for hearing or analyzing timbre. Rather, he challenged readers with the now famous question ‘Who dares to put forth [a] theory here?’ (‘Wer wagt hier Theorie zu fordern’, *Harmonielehre*, 507).

#### Aims and Repertoire Studied

Since the first decades of the 20th century, scholars have increasingly noted the lack of methods for conducting timbral analyses. Most recently, new possibilities for discussing timbre have evolved from areas including gender studies, music cognition, voice analysis, and culture studies. This approach not only develops understanding of familiar works in the classical canon and Western popular music, but it also provides another point of engagement for perhaps less familiar music (e.g., non-Western-, modern-, electronic-, and early music). Further, it elevates the collaborative influence and potential of historical and current performers. My research addresses works for solo *Sprechstimme* throughout Schoenberg’s career by using some of these new strategies. Examples consist of written and recorded melodrama excerpts from *Gurre-Lieder* (‘Herr Gänsefuß, Frau Gänsekraut’), *Pierrot lunaire*, and *A Survivor from Warsaw*.

#### Methods

Essays from the diverse areas mentioned above connect through the field of voice studies and offer a methodological basis for timbral analysis, which will be applied to *Gurre-Lieder*, *Pierrot lunaire*, and *A Survivor from Warsaw*. I incorporate these essays alongside primary source study and existing Schoenberg scholarship, including Ulrich Krämer’s work on notational changes to the *Sprechmelodien* (vocal lines made up of *Sprechstimmen*) throughout Schoenberg’s career. Cornelia Fales’s article ‘The Paradox of Timbre’ foregrounds timbre instead of melody in vocal music and suggests that listeners who are accustomed to attending primarily to melody tend to suffer from ‘timbre deafness’. She observes timbre as a feature which necessarily depends on the perception of sound by listeners, which is both pre-cognitive and malleable. Schoenberg, I argue, capitalized on the emotional immediacy of vocal timbre in his use of *Sprechstimme* to achieve a more direct expression of emotion. Freya Jarman’s monograph *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw* and Yvon Bonenfant’s article ‘Queer Listening to Queer Vocal Timbres’ position ways of considering the voice as a ‘third space’, between the producer and the receiver. I emphasize that both *Sprechstimme* and *Sprechmelodie* occupy a third space, and that Schoenberg explicitly used non-normative voices and vocal parts to move beyond the literary texts he set.

#### Implications

This study addresses the impact of vocal timbre in Arnold Schoenberg’s *Sprechmelodien*, using a hybrid method based in both primary source study and voice studies. Results indicate that timbre has a significant influence as an expressive, structural, and dramatic device in these works. My essay augments insight from traditional types of formal and harmonic analysis, and creates new critical perspectives which through both historical- and ethnomusicological methods.

#### Keywords

Arnold Schoenberg, *A Survivor from Warsaw* Op. 46, *Gurre-Lieder*, Melodrama, *Pierrot lunaire* Op. 21, *Sprechstimme*, *Sprechmelodie*, Timbral Function, Vocality, Voice Studies.

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