

# Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* : concert piece or music theatre work?

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*Pierrot Lunaire* by Arnold Schoenberg constitutes an emblematic work for the music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The innovation introduced by Schoenberg through the elimination of tonality, and the consequences this had for the later developments of New Music (from the fifties to the present day); the way in which the composer elaborated the newly rediscovered genre of melodrama, transforming it in an entirely original way; the new paths opened by *Sprechgesang* for the utilization of the voice, as well as the decisive influence of *Pierrot* on the works of other important composers, such as Ravel (*Trois poèmes de Mallarmè*, 1913) and Stravinsky (*Poésies de la lyrique japonaise*, 1915) (Philippot Michel, 1974) are only a few of the issues that have been dealt with in the extended literature with reference to this work.

The subject of the present study is an examination from a performer's perspective, of whether *Pierrot Lunaire* should be viewed as a concert piece or a music theatre work.

The paper is organized, as an allusion to Schoenberg's deep interest in number mysticism, into three parts<sup>1</sup>. A brief look, through the restructuring of existing information about the first representations of the work, into the origins of *Pierrot's* creation as well as into

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<sup>1</sup> *Pierrot Lunaire*, created by three authors, Giraud, Hartleben and Schoenberg is set into three parts and each part contains seven poems. All the poems have three four-line stanzas and the first line is given three times (with repetitions at lines seven and thirteen).

the composer's own instructions to the performers, the exploration of Schoenberg's relation to the words – through the study of his written texts as reflections of his ideas and perspectives regarding issues of aesthetics and interpretation – and the discussion of the practical significance of the terms 'concert piece' and 'music theatre' for the performer in relation to specific examples from the score, will provide the fundamental axes around which this study shall revolve in order to trace back *Pierrot's* Journey to his homeland and determine where his homeland is.

Early in 1912 Schoenberg was commissioned by the wealthy Viennese actress Albertine Zehme to compose a work for voice and piano accompaniment<sup>1</sup> based on poems by the Belgian symbolist Albert Kayenberg (1860 – 1923), who wrote under the pseudonym Albert Giraud. Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire* comprised fifty poems (in French) and was published in 1884. It is unlikely that Schoenberg used the original French version of *Pierrot*. As the exact title of Opus 21 suggests (*Three Times Seven Poems by Albert Giraud in German Translation by Otto Hartleben*) the composer studied the German translation by the poet and playwright Otto Hartleben which, according to commentators such as André Schaeffner and Willy Reich, 'was superior to the original both in literary form and power as well as in taste'<sup>2</sup> and 'considerably deepened the content of the cycle'<sup>3</sup> and had such an impact on his imagination that he decided to accept the commission and to sign a contract on 9 March 1912. On 28 January he wrote in his diary: 'Read the forward, looked at the poems, am enthusiastic, ... Brilliant idea, just right for me' (Simms, 2000, p. 123).

Zehme, who had also studied music, according to H.H. Stuckenschmidt, and was familiar with the genre of melodrama, toured Germany reciting Giraud's poetry (she had selected twenty two of Hartleben's translation) set to music, apparently not in a very successful way, by Otto

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<sup>1</sup> Once he started to compose, the accompaniment "grew into an ensemble of five instruments playing a total of eight instruments..." (Shawn, 2002, p. 142)

<sup>2</sup> Stuckenschmidt, 1959, p. 65

<sup>3</sup> Reich, 1971, p. 74

Vrieslander. Dissatisfied with the artistic result, she was advised to approach Schoenberg who had recently resettled in Berlin (September of 1911) and was giving a series of lectures at the Stern Conservatory.

Although Schoenberg's selection of the poems for his *Pierrot* cycle was entirely personal – as was the choice of their order, which is not that of the original – a glimpse at the reproduction of the first page of the printed program for Zehme's 1911 evening of recitations of *Pierrot Lunaire* shows that the composer retained some elements mainly relating to the narrative structure and to the progression from a light, colorful mood (Part I) to a dark, macabre and sadistic tone (Part II) and then to a bitter-sweet nostalgia (Part III)<sup>1</sup>.

Albertine Zehme was coached by the pianist Eduard Steuermann and rehearsals began in late August at the actresses' house in Berlin. As violinist Hermann Scherchen remembers, he could hear Schoenberg through a glass door in a ground floor room '*speaking some of the text in a voice of thunder*' that along with his '*expressive gestures, betrayed the ecstasy of a man transported quite beyond himself*' while he and Frau Zehme were doing some preliminary work before a rehearsal (Reich, 1971, p. 77).

A dress rehearsal took place at the Choralionsaal on 9 October and a week later, on 16 October 1912, the first public performance was held followed by two more performances in that same hall and then by a month-long tour of eleven cities in Germany and Austria including Munich and Vienna. Most of the performances were conducted by Schoenberg and some by Scherchen who, although he had shown unwillingness to accept the offer to play the violin part feeling he would not be competent technically, replaced Schoenberg at some of the rehearsals.

It is not the aim of the present study to discuss the reactions of critics and experts to the work. Nevertheless a brief citation of some of the reviews written after the first performances

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<sup>1</sup> In Zehme's 1911 *Pierrot* the third grouping of texts has death as its central image

as well as a short mention of *Pierrot's* reception by the public, can offer an indication of the conflicting effects that Opus 21 generated – and still generates! – from its very first presentation until nowadays, and at the same time the admiration of the work's originality by Schoenberg's fellow composers.

We learn from H.H.Stuckenschmidt that Max Marschalk (*Vossicher Zeitung*), who was also Schoenberg's first publisher, considered the performance 'incomplete' due to Zehme's technical inadequacy, which – unlike the excellent performance of the musicians – led to the impossibility *'to tell whether her performance represented unsuccessful speech or singing'*. On the other hand, the theatre critic Alfred Kerr praised *Pierrot's* performances as the *'beginning of a new stage in listening'* and, although he described much of Zehme's interpretation as amateurish, he claimed that she *'unselfishly and unaffectedly gave all of herself'* (Stuckenschmidt, 1959, p. 61).

Surprisingly, and unlike the disapproving reaction of a considerable number of critics and commentators, audiences of *Pierrot's* first performances – among which we can mention some of the greatest composers of the time such as Ravel, Stravinsky, Webern and, later, Puccini – were enthusiastic. After the end of the 16 October performance a great number of spectators remained in the hall and forced a repeat!

Webern reported after the premiere that there was enthusiasm after the second part and that at the end it was an "unqualified success". Stravinsky called *Pierrot Lunaire* *'the solar plexus as well as the mind of early twentieth century music'* and when asked by Robert Craft in 1957 what his impressions of *Pierrot* had been he answered that he was *'immensely impressed by the whole contrapuntal and polyphonic structure of this brilliant instrumental masterpiece'* (Reich, 1971, p. 78). After the 1927 performance in Frankfurt Kurt Weill pointed out that

*‘Pierrot’s decisive significance for the musical development of the last decades is recognized even by Schoenberg’s enemies’<sup>1</sup>*

I consider *Pierrot’s* staging during the first performances to be, along with the composer’s writings, one of the most authoritative sources of information regarding both the visual as well as the interpretative result that Schoenberg wished to achieve through the performance of his work.

In addition to the fact that Albertine Zehme, who had commissioned the work and was its original interpreter, was an actress (a ‘specialist in the performance of melodrama’<sup>2</sup>) there are three main elements that suggest a strong connection between the performance practice of the piece and theatre: the way in which Zehme appeared on stage, the fact that the instrumentalists were rendered invisible during the performance, and the delivery of the poetic text through the half – sung voice of *Sprechgesang*.

Albertine Zehme stood alone on stage in a Columbine’s costume and recited the text in front of a dark wall: ‘Dark screens stood on the stage and between them Zehme in the costume of Columbine. Behind the scenes a handful of musicians conducted by Schoenberg played’ (Stuckenschmidt, 1959, p 60). A reviewer for *Musical America* who attended the first performance adds: ‘At the performance in question a high green screen stretched across the whole front of the stage. A panel in the center of the screen was set back a couple of feet, leaving an opening at one side. The musicians were to be concealed and the reader was to stand upon a small platform in this niche’<sup>3</sup>.

There is a striking similarity between this description and the picture painted by Alfred Kerr after hearing the cabaret star Marya Delvard (‘a woman vamp, dressed in black with

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<sup>1</sup> Ringer, 1990, chapter 5

<sup>2</sup> Reich, 1971, p. 74

<sup>3</sup> *Musical America*, 16 November 1912, in *Dossier de presse de Pierrot Lunaire d’Arnold Schoenberg* edited by Francois Lesure (Geneva, Editions Minkoff, 1985)

chalk white face who sang in a stylized manner and whose effect on audiences was electric,)<sup>1</sup> in Berlin in 1904: ‘Marya Delvard sings in the green light of child murder...Her melody was a singsong accompanied by some few instruments. The performer stands separately in front of a gray cloth’ (Simms, 2000, p. 135).

Although Schoenberg never referred to cabaret performance as a source of inspiration in connection with his *Pierrot*, he was (as stated later) certainly very familiar with the ambience of the *diseuse* act in the Viennese and Berlin cabarets and had, as Simms points out, most probably attended Delvard’s performances at *Fledermaus* and *Nachtlicht*<sup>2</sup>.

Besides the doubtless resemblance between *Pierrot’s* staging and the cabaret ambience, *rich with guignol decadence and satiric masks* (Simms, 2000, p.135), there are two additional elements that evoke further connections to theatre practice and more specifically to the genre of melodrama (even though speaking over music was closer to the Parisian *diseuse* style, it ‘*still evokes the world of the little boards in which Schoenberg found himself*’) <sup>3</sup> and to Paul Margueritte’s first performances of his work *Pierrot assassin de sa femme: Sprechgesang* and *Pierrot’s* muteness<sup>2</sup>.

The genre or, more precisely, as Dunsby explains,<sup>3</sup> the dramatic technique of melodrama is evoked by the half – recitation - half – song through which *Pierrot’s* story is told. When Zehme proposed that Schoenberg write *Pierrot* as a melodrama with spoken text, the composer, more familiar with the song form, fused speech and song into *Sprechgesang*. The form of melodrama (Gr. = song – drama, spoken text alternated with or accompanied by instrumental music), popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but ‘*a passing (although significant and tenacious) fashion*’ <sup>4</sup>, did not succeed in surviving in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> <[www.nodanw.com/shows\\_c/cabaret\\_essay.htm](http://www.nodanw.com/shows_c/cabaret_essay.htm)>

<sup>2</sup> Both are cabarets in Vienna

<sup>3</sup> Shawn, 2000, p.41

<sup>2</sup> see discussion on p. 8-9

<sup>3</sup> Dunsby, 1992, p.3

<sup>4</sup> Dunsby, 1992, p.3

Several composers, such as Engelbert Humperdinck in his *Königskinder* (1897) and, later, Richard Strauss and Max Schillings attempted to revive melodrama by changing their approach to conventional declamation and by fixing very precisely the rhythm of the recitation of the poetic text. Schoenberg's innovation lies in the fact that he did not only fix the rhythm of text delivery by indicating it '*as exactly as usual with sung parts*', but he actually wrote '*in note values, notes with sharps and flats and returns to naturals*' (Stuckenschmidt, 1959, p.62)

The technical characteristics of the 'spoken melody' that result from Schoenberg's notation will be discussed later in an attempt to explore the composer's relations to the words. At this point it is interesting to look into the world created by the detailed approximation of the vocal line which, in combination with the selection of the poems, – which are not in *Pierrot's* voice – point directly to the notion of *Pierrot's* muteness.

The voice of the reciter striving to reach the exact pitch at the beginning of each note and '*immediately abandon it again by falling or rising*' in a '*certainly not at all realistic speech*'<sup>1</sup> portrays a *Pierrot* frustrated and full of angst. Yet, is the reciter's voice that of *Pierrot*? Most of the twenty-one poems are *about* *Pierrot*, often written in the third person, and the narrator must of necessity be presented as a woman. Zehme, as mentioned in a preceding stage of the study, appeared in *Pierrot's* first performances in Columbine costume (the idea probably originated from her 1911 performances, where the concluding number was Giraud's final poem 'Böhmischer Krystall' in which 'the author confesses to having dressed up as *Pierrot*')<sup>2</sup>. Schoenberg was against this idea (but had to tolerate it) and did not choose Böhmischer Krystall for his own cycle since Giraud puts an end to *Pierrot's* enigmatic muteness by confirming in this poem that '*the voice that is heard through the entire poetic*

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<sup>1</sup> Schoenberg, Foreword to *Pierrot Lunaire*

<sup>2</sup> Simms, 2000, p.124

*collection is his own voice, disguised as that of Pierrot*'<sup>1</sup>. Even if we decided to ignore Columbine's persona the narrator would still not be a real *Pierrot* for *her* gender would be unfolded by her voice and *Pierrot* would still, in that sense, remain mute.

The idea of the voiceless *Pierrot* is also linked to the 'disappearance' of the instrumentalists from the stage. We could easily suppose that Schoenberg's decision to place the instrumentalists behind the screens served as a solution to a practical problem: Zehme was an actress and, although she had studied music and, according to Stuckenschmidt was coached by Cosima Wagner (who had probably coached her in Wagnerian roles but was not a vocal technique specialist), it is possible that her vocal apparatus did not have the necessary strength to project the sound above the instrumental ensemble. It is also true that the projection of the sound can pose a significant problem even to a real singer with a solid vocal technique since the text is not supposed to be sung nor declaimed in a pompous style but needs to be 'spoken' following with great exactness all the nuances and the various colours indicated by the composer.

Cathy Berberian in her 7 August 1971 concert in Lucca, used a microphone explaining in the presentation note of the concert that this was necessary since *'the precision of the words is an essential element of the piece'*<sup>2</sup>. Berberian substituted Schoenberg's dark screens with her microphone, it could be said, in order to 'push back' the instrumentalists!

Even though this argument seems reasonable, it is more likely that Schoenberg used the screens in order to render the musicians invisible, so that his visible yet absent *Pierrot* would stand alone on stage accompanied by a polyphony of *'phantasmal sounds, emanated from the shadows'*<sup>3</sup>

*Pierrot's* muteness, represented by the replacement of both speech and song through the vocal quality in *Sprechstimme*, and by his *hermaphroditic* identity,(through his substitution

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<sup>1</sup> Simms, 2000, p.125

<sup>2</sup> Vila, 2003, p.266

<sup>3</sup> Kurth, 2002, p.211

on stage by a woman reciter), leads inevitably to the association of Schoenberg's *Pierrot* with Paul Margueritte's *Pierrot assassin de sa femme*.

French novelist and mime Paul Margueritte (born in 1860 in Algeria), a nephew of the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, has contributed to the rediscovery of Pierrot pantomime by the Parisian public in the 1880's. In his mimodrama *Pierrot assassin de sa femme* – premiered in Valvins in 1882 and performed later, in 1888, in Paris in the Théâtre Antoine – Pierrot, having murdered the faithless Columbine, '*because it amused him to do so*',<sup>1</sup> by tying her to the bed and tickling her feet until she expires from excessive laughter, re-enacts the murder scene. Then he unconsciously sets the bed on fire and in a paroxysm of involuntary laughter also dies by both flames and his own laughter.

During the performances the entire scene was mimed by Margueritte alone, '*miming by turns the husband and the wife, the murdered and both victims*' (Kurth, 2000, p.207). The mime made a deep impression on his public with his ability to '*transform from Pierrot into Columbine with three gestures and a smile*'<sup>2</sup>.

Hermaphroditic rendition of *Pierrot* aside, Schoenberg's *Pierrot* and that of Margueritte share an important characteristic: Margueritte, an autodidact who taught himself the art of pantomime relying primarily on the '*faithful testimonies of a large mirror*'<sup>3</sup>, looks within his pantomime into the concept of laughter and disfigures it by turning the mirror on *Pierrot* himself. In Schoenberg's *Mondfleck* (No. 18) the fugue between piccolo and clarinet and the canon between violin and alto meet in measure 10 of the piece, exactly at the point where *Pierrot* turns around and sees the moonlight spot on his back, and from the middle of measure 10 they run backwards in a '*strict retrograde of the first half of the piece*' (Dunsby, 1992, p.66). Schoenberg uses these musical figures '*inverted and mirrored in the boldest possible*

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<sup>1</sup> Keister, 2000

<sup>2</sup> Keister, 2000

<sup>3</sup> Keister, 2000

way’<sup>1</sup> in order to allow his *Pierrot* to discover the bright spot on the back of his coat exactly in the same way that he had himself used the mirror in order to paint one his most famous oil paintings ‘Self-portrait from behind’.

What do Schoenberg’s writings on *Pierrot* reveal about the composer’s relation to the words? In December 1901, Schoenberg was engaged as Kapellmeister of the Überbrettel Company of Berlin by its director Ernst von Wolzogen. Although, according to the biographer H.H Stuckenschmidt, he was already familiar with the new cabaret movement by the end of 1900 and had himself set some of the poems contained in the volume of *Deutsche Chansons (Brettel-Lieder, compiled by Otto Bierbaum and published in 1900)*, his ‘night-club work of making arrangements and writing songs...’ (Dunsby, 1992, p.4) brought Schoenberg even closer to the decadent spirit of the Berlin cabaret, which was probably the main factor leading him to turn away from the Überbrettel circle only one year after being appointed main composer, conductor and orchestrator.

In an attempt to avoid the style of recitation common at the cabarets of the time, in the Foreword of the first edition of his Op.21, Schoenberg gives very specific instructions to the performer regarding what she should do, or better, what she should not do in order to perform the music according to his intentions. With these statements the composer introduces a new era in the use of the voice, delineating, in an assertive yet ambiguous way, the technical characteristics of *Sprechgesang*. This ambiguity is precisely the reason why, even today, *Pierrot* poses ‘an enduring and perhaps insoluble interpretative enigma for the performer’ (Simms, 2000, p. 132). Rapoport<sup>2</sup> and several other commentators have engaged in comparative study of differing approaches in performance of the work.

This is what Schoenberg writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Reich, 1971, p.75

<sup>2</sup> Rapoport, Eliezer (2004): *Schoenberg – Hartleben’s Pierrot Lunaire: Speech – Poem – Melody – Vocal Performance*

‘The melody given in notation in the vocal part (with a few specially indicated exceptions) is not intended to be sung. The performer has the task of transforming it into a *speech melody* [*Sprechmelodie*], taking the prescribed pitches carefully into account. She accomplishes this by:

- I. adhering to the rhythm as precisely as if he were singing; that is, with no more freedom than he would allow himself if it were sung melody;
- II. being precisely aware of the difference between a *sung tone* and a *spoken tone*: the sung tone maintains the pitch unaltered; the spoken tone does indicate it, but immediately abandons it again by falling or rising. But the performer must take great care not to lapse into a singsong speech pattern. That is absolutely not intended. The goal is certainly not at all realistic, natural speech. On the contrary, the difference between ordinary speech and speech that collaborates in a musical form must be made plain. But it should not call singing to mind either.

Furthermore, the following should be said about the performance:

The performer’s task here is at no time to derive the mood and character or the individual pieces from the meaning of the words, but always solely from the music. To the extent that the tonepainterly representation [*tonmalerische Darstellung*] of the events and feelings in the text were of importance to the composer, it will be found in the music anyway. Wherever the performer fails to find it, he must resist adding something that the composer did not intend. If he did so, he would not be adding, but subtracting’. (English translation of the original german text by Stanley Appelbaum, 1994).

In the first half of this introductory passage Schoenberg establishes the theory underlying *Sprechgesang* and - in a seemingly simple manner and through nearly self-evident advice - describes how the desired acoustic effect can be achieved. It is notable that this description

appears so obvious that the performer may find herself at risk of ignoring it or passing it over, without dedicating the necessary time and attention in order to reflect on it.

Nonetheless, the faithful application of these few lines can lead to an impressive result. The risk of excess, or of the carrying out of a performance ‘de mauvais gout’ can easily be avoided if the performer resists the temptation to add her own view and comment on the style of speech conceived by the composer. One thing is certain: Schoenberg clearly says that the voice he wishes to give to his *Pierrot* should not involve ‘a realistic – natural speech’. Directly after this and as if he wants to ensure that he has been completely understood, he continues: ‘on the contrary the difference between ordinary speech and speech that collaborates in a musical form must be made plain’.

The second half of the preface brings to mind the spirit of the essay ‘The Relation to the Text’ that the composer sent to Kandinsky for inclusion in the 1912 almanac *Das Blaue Reiter*:

*‘The assumption that a piece of music must summon up images of one sort or another, and that if these are absent the piece of music has not been understood or is worth-less, is as widespread as only the false and banal can be’* (Kurth, 2000, p. 218).

Beyond the technical exigencies of *Sprechstimme* what is more important to Schoenberg is that the reciter’s performance should be deprived of all trace of sentimentality and pathos. Both the second half of the preface and the above stated paragraph with which ‘The Relation to the text’ begins, echo in Schoenberg’s humorous attempt to dissuade Zehme from being overly tragic and impassioned in her way of reciting the text:

‘Don’t despair, Frau Zehme, don’t despair.

There is such a thing as life insurance’.

Moreover, it is true that, whenever the composer intends to make an allusion to a specific symbol or to emphasise a specific idea, his intentions can indeed be found in the

musical material, as already noted earlier in the mirror – technique of No 18. Among many examples, we might site *‘Mondestrunken’*, the very opening of the cycle, where the cello (Schoenberg’s instrument) enters with an expressive melody in bar 29 when the poet is mentioned for the first time, and *‘Nacht’* (No 8), where we can actually hear the black gigantic butterflies in the instrumentation of bass clarinet, cello and piano, all playing in their lowest registers. As Simms appositely remarks, Schoenberg *‘moves the burden of expressivity almost fully to the instruments’*.

Elsewhere Schoenberg recalls how he was once deeply ashamed to realize that for many of Schubert’s lieder, although he was musically very familiar with them, he had never read the poems on which they were based. Nevertheless, once he actually read the poems, he realized that no decisive change had occurred to the way he had conceptualized the music, and that *‘without knowing the poem, I had grasped the content, the real content, perhaps even more profoundly than if I had clung to the surface of the mere thoughts expressed in words’* (Kurth, 2000, p. 219).

From Schoenberg’s ‘often purely impressionistic’ relationship to the text<sup>1</sup> as well as from his determination, according to Alan Lessem, to *‘absorb speech into music’*<sup>2</sup> it can be seen that the composer does not rely on the superficial meaning of words but, instead, seeks for the real content which, according to him, is the musical content, in other words, the musical interpretation.

Therefore, it seems that what really matters to the composer is *not* the sense of the text – which, for him, only pertains to the ‘the mere thoughts expressed in words’ – but the *sound* of the words. Could there be a more appropriate space, where the *real content of the words* may reverberate, where all tendencies for analysis and reasoning will be broken and in which the

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<sup>1</sup> Stuckenschmidt, 1959, p.67

<sup>2</sup> Lessem, 1979, p.136; quoted in Simms, 2000, p. 133

finest chords of fantasy, dream and the subconscious will resonate, other than the magical space of theatre?

In the third part of the paper various practical aspects of both concert version and theatrical performance of *Pierrot Lunaire* will be discussed in an attempt to define the extent to which they may condition the performer's – and the public's – approach to the work.

The most apparent difference, between the two ways of performing *Pierrot*, and one of the main characteristics of a concert performance, is the use of a music stand. The presence of the music stand, unless requested by the composer and indicated specifically in the score, constitutes a physical as well as a psychological barrier between the performer and the audience. On some occasions it may be used as part of the scenery in order to create a particular effect but in the case of *Pierrot* no metaphor or poetic imagery seems to suggest the image of a music stand as a companion to the solitary hero.

The consequences of the use of the music stand can be summarized as follows:

Among the positive aspects, is an implicit precision of the musical interpretation – due to the performer's ability to follow the score without distraction – as well as a certain 'distance', a non-identification, between the reciter and his text (in conformity with the composer's demand that *'performers ought not to add illustrations and moods of their own derived from the text'*).

On the other hand, the presence of the music stand may create a long chain of reactions to the body of the performer which, however imperceptible, play a decisive part in the overall artistic result.

As Antonin Artaud claims in his 'Le Théâtre et son double', the stage is a 'physical and concrete space that demands to be filled...' (*'la scène est un lieu physique et concret qui demande qu'on le remplisse...'*)<sup>1</sup>. The performer needs to 'project' herself into the space in

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<sup>1</sup> Artaud, 1999, p.55

order to fill the stage, and the way she holds her body while reciting is crucial to the accomplishment of such an objective. When using a music stand, the center of gravity of the body can be slightly displaced because of the tendency to lean towards the music score. This puts additional strain on the body and leads the performer to stiffen the jaw, lift the chest and pull the head back and down onto the spine.

Excessive muscular tension interferes dramatically with all the reflexes throughout the human body and has a marked effect on voice and breathing as well as on the performer's attitude towards both the work and the audience.

One of the effects of the erroneous posture, mainly caused by the use of unnecessary tension in the neck, is the sensation of 'locking' the body and, consequently, blocking its very center of expressiveness, that is, the solar plexus. What an ironic and inappropriate way to perform the '*solar plexus of twentieth-century music*'! The lack of directness, spontaneity and generosity affects the performer's ability to communicate with the audience and suppresses the dialectical relation between them, which constitutes the very essence of any live performance. No work of art is ever stationary, every time it 'breathes', it evolves and may undergo an exciting transformation through the continuous interchange of energy between the performer and the public. That is precisely the reason why the real experience of such a complex piece as *Pierrot* cannot be sufficiently communicated through a recording (not even a live one!)

The quality of the performer's presence on stage is also determined by three factors that are closely related to the pantomiming *Pierrot*, thus suggesting that Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* above all other works should be performed on a theatre stage rather than in an auditorium: the intelligibility of his / her facial expressions, the power of his / her glance and the ability to trace invisible objects and create illusions with the slightest gesture.

Nevertheless, going back to use of a music stand, the performer's face '*white as a yet unwritten page*' according to Mallarmé's description of the mime – where images, sentiments and moods are continuously written and immediately erased to be 'written over' by other moods, becomes less legible while following the score because of both muscular and mental activity that take away part of its independence.

Yoshi Oida points out in his '*Invisible Actor*'<sup>1</sup> the great importance of the focusing, the intensity and the direction of the performer's glance in the Kabuki tradition as well as in any other theatre practice. Still, when following a text, the eyes of the performer are not able to participate completely in his / her acting, since the faintest eye movement that is not fully integrated to the expressiveness of the character can interrupt the concentration and dissipate the atmosphere.

Since the presence of the music stand apparently constitutes a problematical issue, a logical solution for the reciter would be to hold the vocal score in her hands, as very often is the case in concerts of sacred or symphonic music. Yet, a new problem will then arise: Among the performer's means of communication, those that are most closely connected to the art of pantomime and that inevitably evoke *Pierrot's* ephemeral presence on the stage, are his / her hands, through which the body's inner energy is manifested into the external world. This energy is not to be necessarily reflected on impressive gestures: the maximum of intensity can be expressed with the slightest movement of a finger or even through immobility. Nevertheless, in order to accomplish the superhuman and, in a way, 'magical' task of transforming a word or an image into a vibrant, almost visible reality, the hands need to be totally free. The '*gruesome*' but also '*delightfully playful*'<sup>2</sup> act of *Pierrot* in No. 16 (where he bores the head of Cassander's bald pate), and the obsessive rubbing of the 'snowy fleck of shining moonlight on the shoulder of his black silk coat' in No. 18, are only two of the

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<sup>1</sup> Oida and Marshall, 1997, p.31

<sup>2</sup> Dunsby, 1992, p.63

characteristic examples of the importance of the hands throughout Op. 21 whilst their decisive role becomes even clearer in No. 6 (where the Madonna carries her Son's bloodied body in her arms manifesting him to mankind) and in 'blasphemous' No. 11 (*'his hand, with grace, invested, rends through the priestly garments'* and *'with signs of benediction shows to frightened people his ripped – out heart, in bloody fingers'*) where the summit of intensity is reached.

In this particular melodrama a hint of metaphysical fear is introduced. This fear, that can be found at the basis of all ancient tradition and is not exclusively derived from the text, is one of the most essential and effective elements of theatre. Another important element, that also exists independently of the text, is the poetic dimension of the stage revealed by the costumes (as an indication that a performance is not a continuation of everyday life), the scenery and the particular effects of light upon human spirit (illuminations).

Such means of artistic expression cannot be found in a concert performance which, on the other hand, is characterized by technical perfection, musical precision, absolute concentration, minimization of pathos – elements that, in turn, are indispensable and form the solid basis on which a theatrical performance of *Pierrot* may be built.

Consequently as shown in this study, everything in Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* suggests the theatrical substance of the piece. The dilemma '*Pierrot: concert piece or music theatre work?*' is merely another of the many ambiguities of the Giraud – Hartleben – Schoenberg masterpiece. *Pierrot* is at once a '*tragic hero and a fool, eliciting sympathy and mockery together*'<sup>1</sup>, the light and satirical mood of the work is fused with a dark and sadistic tone, *sprechgesang* lies between song and speech, the central performer is sometimes identified with *Pierrot* sometimes not... The performer, following *Pierrot's* example – who, when faced with two alternatives, generally chooses both!<sup>2</sup> – should approach the work as a whole, as an

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<sup>1</sup> Griffiths, 1998, p. 5

<sup>2</sup> Griffiths, 1998, p. 6

indivisible unity of text, music and theatre, where 'theatre' does not necessarily refer to a veritable stage but rather stands for the performer's ability (and sensibility) to go beyond the surface level of the words in the same way that Schoenberg penetrates with his music into the world of the subconscious.

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