

Seven Early Songs by Alban Berg

アルバン・ベルク作曲 ≪7つの初期の歌≫

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日本語要旨

アルバン・ベルク（1885–1935）は、シェーンベルク、ヴェーベルンとならび、今世紀初頭に活躍した第二ヴィーン楽派のひとりである。20世紀初頭の作曲家たちは、調性音楽の崩壊という流れの中で、新たなシステムと語法を模索していた。シェーンベルクが、新しい音列システムである12音技法を手に入れて、調性の枠組みから抜け出していったのに対して、その弟子ベルクは生涯、調性音楽から完全に逸脱することなく、音列を用いながらも、新しい要素はあくまでも伝統の中に組み入れることで、独自の音楽語法を確立していった。

ベルクはシェーンベルクに師事していた青年期に、100曲をこえる歌曲を作曲している。この中からベルクが自分自身で7曲を選び出しまとめたのが、この≪7つの初期の歌≫である。現在、カリフォルニアのヘイリー、ブラント両博士によって、≪初期の歌曲集≫が出版されるところだが、これら初期の歌曲からは、ベルクがいかに、シューベルト、シューマン、ヴォルフと続くドイツ・リート伝統を受け継いでいるかがよくわかる。と同時に、シェーンベルクも指摘しているように、このごく初期の段階ですでに、のちのベルクの作風を特徴づける様々な要素を見いだすことができる。独特の対位法、均整のとれた形式、ピッチやリズムそして音列のシンメトリックな取り扱い、各声部間の緻密な関係、多彩な響きなど、ベルク固有の音楽書法が、いくぶん未熟な技術ではあれ、見事に芽生えているといえよう。

本稿では、ベルクの育った芸術環境や、≪7つの初期の歌≫が作曲された頃の創作背景にも触れながら、7曲を年代順にとりあげ、ベルク固有の音楽語法について、特に演奏者の観点から概観してみた。

西欧ではレクチャー・リサイタルという形式がある。これはリサイタルの前に、演奏される曲目に関するレクチャー（講演）を伴うもので、レクチャーは鑑賞の質を高めるのに大きな役割を果たしている。本来ならば演奏と対をなすものであるが、本稿を演奏前のレクチャーとして理解して頂ければ幸いである。従って、脚注はなるべく本文に含まれるように配慮し、また平易な言い回しにつとめた。

なお本稿は、1991年12月、ソプラノのマーガレット・モリソン嬢の協力を得て、ロサンジェルス南カリフォルニア大学で行なった博士号レクチャー・リサイタルのレクチャー部分を改訂したものである。

The *Seven Early Songs* by Alban Berg is a collection of seven individual songs that Berg composed in his early musical training period of 1905-1908. On publishing this set of songs in 1928, Berg not only picked up these particular ones from his huge collection of songs, but also he gave them new lives by means of colorful orchestration. Berg's early training was carefully instructed by Schoenberg, the most respected teacher in Vienna at that time. Schoenberg recalls Berg's talent in his early song writing :

“When Alban Berg came to me in 1904, he was a tall youngster and extremely timid. But when I saw the compositions he showed me — songs in a style between Hugo Wolf and Brahms — I recognized at once that he was a real talent.”

Observations of the *Seven Early Songs* allow us to trail Berg's musical transformation in his earlier stage, through the tradition of German *Lieder* to gradual growth of the proto-type of his personal compositional ideas.

In October of 1904, Berg's sister Smaragda found an announcement in Vienna's *New Musical Press*. It was about some courses in music theory and history given by Schoenberg, Zemlinsky, and Dr. Bienenfeld. Smaragda passed this announcement on to her brother Charly (Carl Berg, Alban's elder brother), who borrowed several of Alban's songs and went to see Schoenberg. This meeting turned out to be a turning point of Alban Berg's life. The teacher who had just turned thirty, looked over the work and sent back an invitation for the young Berg to join his classes, free of charge.

Thus, in October of 1904, 19-year-old Berg began to study with Schoenberg. His musical background was that of a passionate young amateur, in a music-loving household in Vienna. Alban's parents, Conrad and Johanna, took their children to

galleries, the theater, concerts, and to the opera. Smaragda was a gifted pianist and her brother Charly's gifts were vocal. Alban was the one with the least conspicuous musical talents. He was no more thrilled by music than he was by literature, poetry, or drawing.

However, he loved to play four-hand music with his sister. Many of these scores bore Alban's subjective, critical comments based on his limited knowledge and musicianship at that time. Of all, Brahms was one of Alban's favourites. He found the Third Symphony "wunderschoen," and frequently performed Brahms Trios, Op. 8 and Op. 101. Alban's highest compliment was saved for *Ein deutsches Requiem*: "Das ist Musik." Brahms was to have a lasting effect on Berg.

Under these influences, Berg started his first compositions, virtually all songs that could be performed by Charly, Smaragda, and Alban himself. These early songs became known for the first time by H. E. Redlich when he published his Berg biography in 1957. Redlich's list of songs are based on Mrs. Berg's own list. Then, Berg's songs were extensively studied by N. Chadwick in his article of 1971: "Berg's Unpublished Songs in the Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek (Austrian National Library)." Most recently, these are newly compiled by Drs. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey.

Musical recreation of the Bergs, thus, gave Alban the practical reasons to produce a massive amount of songs. There are also some other factors to his song writing. Alban's passion to his future wife Helene as well as his love to poetry and literature.

One day, the twenty-year-old composer wrote a letter to his friend, Watznauer, that he wanted an honorable, wonderful woman who will be devoted to him and will show him the way to the glory. A little after this, he found someone who seemed to meet his requirements. She was Helene Nahowsky, who was widely rumored to be the illegitimate daughter of Emperor Franz Joseph. In addition to her rather obvious resemblance to the Hapsburgs, she was strikingly beautiful. Both Alban and Helene loved the romantic world and both believed in love at first sight. Berg's letters to Helene starting in the Spring of 1907 shortly after they met, were edited by Bernard Grun, entitled *Alban Berg: Letters to his Wife*. This gives us the

true thoughts and feelings of Berg. Another book, edited by Juliane Brand, Christopher Hailey, and Donald Harris: *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence* is also extremely fruitful to understand his personality. From reading these letters, it is quite obvious that Helene affected Berg tremendously and their relationship made significant creative advances especially in the private, recreational songs he wrote outside Schoenberg's classes. Here is an example of an undated letter of 1907, showing how much she inspired him :

“...I was almost overwhelmed by your greatness—when you sang. The beauty of your voice and the intensity of feeling you put into your singing left me so moved and delighted, I could not speak. ... It had made such an impression on me, both in artistic and in human terms. To sing like you and even to listen like me—agreed?—is a profession of true artistic appreciation.

That's why I am writing to you now with my thanks—thanks beyond number. Not only for the two *Lieder*, but also for the feeling you have awakened in me, that I love a woman with great art in her, the art which means everything to me and builds me the finest bridge to exalted humanity: music.

It's now 2:45 am.—so sleep well, dearest musician!”

The *Seven Early Songs* are especially revealing of the rapid-fire progress, inspired by his love to Helene. Each work represented a new musical conquest; each piece invariably away from its predecessor. In 1928, when he was beginning serious work on *Lulu*, Berg realized that it would be to his advantage to keep his name before the public. He dipped back into his student days, songs that would recall the tradition from which he had grown. In order to make a big impression of the first performance of these songs, Berg decided to orchestrate them. Three out of the seven had already been performed before he compiled this set. “Die Nachtigall” was among the first been presented publicly in the winter of 1905. On November 7th in 1907, Berg made his official debut as a composer, in the concert of music by Schoenberg's students. “Die Nachtigall,” “Traumgekroent,” and “Liebesode” had been Berg's entries and among the audience were Alma Mahler and Zemlinsky. In 1928, Berg chose another four songs from his private song collection, which were written in the years of his most intensive and basic study with

Schoenberg. Schoenberg was very pleased with the first Berlin performance of the *Seven Early Songs* orchestrated version, and congratulated the composer for his successful improvement in the orchestration techniques. Berg replied with pleasure, admitting that the songs of his youth still had special meaning for him, and that he associated them with Schoenberg's classes. Here, I won't talk about his orchestration in detail, rather, I would like to concentrate on the original, piano-vocal version. However, I must mention that the symphonic accompaniments, making use of different combination of instruments in every song, give the music new color and dimension. His colorful and extremely motivic treatment of the orchestral instruments shows, somewhat the similar effects of Klimt's society women in the golden dresses.

Among the young Bergs, Alban's love to literature was the deepest of all. He would never give up Ibsen, who was his "living ideal," Strindberg, Goethe and Shakespeare. But at the age of twenty-two he was also reading more Wedekind, who was the playwright-actor of the opera *Lulu*, and some other writers whose emphases were on the sensual, psychological and neurotic side of the human beings. The ideas of Sigmund Freud were beginning to permeate in Vienna. In Vienna, where everyone knew everyone else, Alban and Helene were acquainted with Freud, Adler, Klimt, Kokoschka, and so on. In those active artistic circles, Berg experienced the movements of *Jugendstil* and Expressionism.

Both movements were extremely important movements in arts at around the turn of the century. *Jugendstil*, associated with the "Sezession" movement and the "Vienna Workshops," was strongly influenced by the oriental designs and coloring, coupled with luxuriant ornament. Joseph Marx is the Austrian representative in music. Expressionism is represented by Kandinsky, Wedekind, and Schoenberg, whose idea is to distort "real" images, and to avoid "ideal" norms of beauty for the sake of expressing the artists' subjective feelings.

In the *Seven Early Songs*, Berg chose seven poems full of romanticism. Although there is no explanation for the relationship between each poems, I would like to point out that the seven songs are arranged as though they form a

continuous story. It starts with opening the door to his "Wunderland," a wonderful dream. Then, in the next three songs, he presents the possessed feeling, passionate love, and timidity in love, respectively. In the fifth and the sixth songs, the lover's image becomes more and more real and sensual. The last song ends with those passionate memories in summer. The text in general is extremely expressive, romantic and sensual. It shows Berg's deep interests in sensual, psychological literature.

Now, I'd like to talk about each piece chronologically, and trace Berg's transformation in his compositional techniques.

"Im Zimmer" is the earliest of the seven songs, dating supposedly from the summer of 1905, within less than a year after Berg started to study with Schoenberg. Johannes Schlaf, a pioneer of German Naturalism, describes the two lovers in front of a fire, silently looking into the eyes. Here, a burning fire symbolizes their love. The dominating shyness, for just being together, is well-expressed in music, employing rather sheer texture in the style of Hugo Wolf. The main motive is an expressive three eighth-note figure. This figure transforms itself into descriptive half-staccato eighth-note section in the accompaniment for the text "Red fire blazing crackling in the stove." Berg employs only a limited chromaticism; its tonal ambiguity, hovering between G minor and B-flat major, derives from a subtle use of irregular resolutions of secondary dominants.

"Die Nachtigall," according to Redlich, was composed in the winter of 1905-06.

Theodor Storm, a famous 19th-century poet, describes a young maid's romantic melancholy: "because the nightingale sang all night, the roses have sprung./ She used to be a wild young maid, but now in deep meditation not knowing what to do." Berg employs a strict *A-B-A* form: the D-major *A*-section, full of romantic expressiveness, reminds us of "Wie Melodien" of Brahms. And in the *B*-section, Berg treats her seriousness almost comically, describing a poor maid, dragging in the summer heat, in F#-minor which is effectively portrayed in the syncopated rhythm in the accompaniment.

The song shows Berg's skillful contrapuntal technique absorbed in Schoenberg's class. The smooth accompaniment of the A-section is woven entirely in deft juxtaposition and transformations of a single motive, supported at most of the downbeats by a single bass note. Although the motive is mostly triadic in structure, it is freely bent, echoed, and overlapped in a continuously moving texture which effectively complements the expressive vocal line. The postlude is a perfect example of the motive telescoping in upon itself, one voice entering immediately on top of another.

In the autumn of 1906, Berg composed "Liebesode," poem by Otto Erich Hartleben, who wrote the text of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. The choice of texts shows a deep direction toward Schoenberg. For the first line, "in the arms of love we slept blissfully," Berg set a quiet, peaceful music, with a main motive characterized by a suspended dotted quarter note resolving by a half step. When "the summer breeze carried out the lovers' peaceful breezing into the bright moonlight," quick arpeggiation played by the left hand in the accompaniment introduces the voluptuous breeze creating the same colorful effect that Klimt does in painting his golden society women. By building up a big climax, using the same motives toward the end, Berg transforms "the summer breeze" into "the lover's wonderous dreams of ecstasy." In the Wiener Stadtbibliothek manuscripts, the two early songs, "Im Zimmer" and "Liebesode" have metronome marks of ♩ = 82 and ♩ = 63, respectively. When Berg published these amongst the *Seven Early Songs*, the metronome marks of both were changed to multiples of 23. "Im Zimmer" now has ♩ = 69 and "Liebesode" has ♩ = 46. The number 23 had a special significance for Berg who regarded it as his fateful number.

"Traumgekroent (A crown of Dreams)," composed in August of 1907, is a setting of Rainer Maria Rilke's famous poem; "That was the day of the white chrysanthemums, / I was almost afraid of their splendour..." This poem, especially, seems to have a special meaning to him. Berg cites this poem twice in his letter to Helene. In the first one, dating from August 17th 1907, he writes how much

Helene's letter inspired him to compose on Rilke's poem :

"...When your letter was brought in to me. 'At last,' I cried, and was just going to open it, when I looked at my song and a sudden burst of self-discipline came over to me!... I put your letter away unopened and with racing heart finished the song."

And then, in the letter, Berg cites the entire poem. Another letter of autumn 1907 is flamed by the lines of this poem. In this letter, Berg expresses his joy of kissing her the day before. Berg's music plays on the word's nervousness. The key signature suggesting G-minor, does not help much until finally confirmed by G-major (as a Picardy third) at the end. The form of the song as a whole is very simple, strophic in two verses of two paired phrases each (A B A' B'). A-section is characterized by the interval of Augmented 4th (Ex. 1), which creates the perfect musical environment of "uncertainty" for the text line "I was afraid." And this insecure, "afraid" feeling is even strengthened harmonically by the two downward half-steps (Ex. 2), all together creating the four-note main motive that begins the accompaniment (Ex. 3).

Ex.1



Ex.2



Ex.3



The accompaniment for the A-section is tightly woven by this four-note motives like in Bach's fugues. As being one of the early examples of Schoenberg's student, "Die Nachtigall" already presented Berg's skillful and favourite techniques of contrapuntal craftsmanship. However, in "Traumgekroent," the main theme is treated much more motivically, which actually helps to produce more tonal ambiguity. The subtle charm of the tonal chromaticism is partly produced by the

surprises of the irregular resolutions, and these in turn are assisted by the abundance of chromatic passing notes and suspensions which is typical of the contrapuntally-generated chromaticism especially after Wagner, as in Bruckner, Wolf, Strauss, Mahler, early Schoenberg, and so on.

The *B*-section, where “you come to take my soul away,” is established in a more secure, stable tonal circumstance. Even with the same neighbor-note suspension, the four-note main motive is now rhythmically reduced, and treated totally diatonically, outlining the major triad in F-major (Ex. 4). When Berg brings back the *A*-section for the 2nd verse, he exchanges the vocal line with the right hand motive in the accompaniment, with a reversed order to start and also with a rhythmic transfiguration. The three quarter-note figure in the vocal line is now rhythmically reduced to the three eighth-note figure in the accompaniment. Tonal resolution of the piece is totally depended upon the accompaniment in the postlude, which ends with the Picardy third (G minor to G major).



In short, this song is densely constructed by the simple four-note motives, and shows Berg’s skillful motivic-contrapuntal technique under his charming tonal ambiguity with his favourite ‘creeping’ effect. Berg’s early chromatic harmony is characteristically rich in harmonic progression that are only related tonally, but which are strongly connected by stepwise relationships and common tones. This contrapuntal habit, which the Berg scholars call ‘creeping,’ is one of Berg’s characteristic phenomena in his harmonic treatment.

This kind of harmony is typical of the ‘hovering tonality’ of passages in works such as Liszt’s *Mephisto Waltz* or Chopin’s *E-minor Prelude*. It involves differential chromatic descent of the bass against suspensions in the other voices, resolved or unresolved, producing root successions that are usually only distantly related. The most likely models for this kind of harmony, however, are Hugo Wolf’s songs, with their frequent and intense modulating chromaticism in relatively short musical spaces.

A particularly apt example of “creeping” is found in a passage from “Schilflied,” composed in the spring of 1908. This is an illustration of symmetrical creeping with two voices moving chromatically in contrary motion. As the reduction of the outer parts shows (Ex. 5); this ‘chromatic wedge’ was Berg’s favourite device and that can be found in nearly all of his works. From the textual point of view, the “creeping” harmony is also extremely effective in this song. Nikolaus Lenau’s poem is haunting and obsessed by the lover’s voice. “Through a secret path, I go to a reedy shore, where, in the evening, the reeds rustle mysteriously, whispering that I should weep. For I think I hear your sweet voice...”

Ex.5 m. 9 10 11 12

The image shows a musical score for two staves, treble and bass clef. Above the staves, the text 'Ex.5' is on the left, and 'm. 9 10 11 12' is centered. The music consists of a series of notes moving chromatically in contrary motion between the two staves. In measure 9, the treble staff has a whole note G4 and the bass staff has a whole note G3. In measure 10, the treble staff has a whole note A4 and the bass staff has a whole note F3. In measure 11, the treble staff has a whole note B4 and the bass staff has a whole note E3. In measure 12, the treble staff has a whole note C5 and the bass staff has a whole note D3. The notes are connected by a dotted line, indicating a continuous chromatic glide.

The most spectacular of the seven songs is, “Nacht,” also composed in the spring of 1908. Carl Hauptmann’s colorful and subtle text lines are extremely well-reflected in music by Berg. The opening whole-tone harmony gives the perfect introduction to the first line: “The clouds grow dark over night and vale.” The overall form is a ‘Bogenform,’ with a varied da capo in the outer sections and an inner section rather like two strophes. Berg showed a remarkable fondness for the Bogenform in nearly all of his subsequent works, including extensive and literal palindromes. Here, Berg uses the whole-tone scales as a means of unifying an entire song. The harmony of the outer sections is characterized by the whole-tone scale, and the middle section is constructed on A-major. This tonal plan perfectly matches with the textual construction. The whole-tone scale for “mists hover and waters murmur”, and the A-major for “a vast wonderland opens...”; and once again the whole-tone scale for “the deep valley in the silent night./ o my soul, drink of solitude.” In the whole-tone scale section, three-note subsets of the whole-tone scale constitute every vertical chords. Two most important subsets of this song are the augmented triad (Ex. 6) and the pyramid-figure (Ex. 7) motives. Both of these motives actually construct the first thematic line in the voice (Ex. 8). At m. 5, the right hand in the accompaniment beautifully describes the movement and the sound

of murmuring waters (Ex. 9). Here, the 16th-note water motive is exactly the same as the main motive but rhythmically reduced.

Ex.6

Ex.7

Ex.8

Ex.9

At the *B*-section (m.9) in the accompaniment where “a vast wonderland opens,” the tonal coherence of *A*-major is established by introducing the clear *A*-major triad for the first time in this piece. However, this tonal coherence is weakened by the tonal activity in the vocal line which tends to swing between the whole-tone and the diatonic scales.

When the opening *A*-section comes back at m. 26, Berg inverted the melody in the vocal line, combined with the original melodic line in the accompaniment. This early practice of Berg’s melodic symmetric device is no different from the thematic inversions of Brahms or Bach. But Berg especially loved this device, and he developed it as a basic premise of his thematic technique, particularly in his twelve-tone works, in which prime and inversion forms equally and exclusively generate the serial substance.

The piece ends with the final repetition of the main whole-tone motive in the accompaniment and the augmented triad on the dominant of *A*-major. This unresolved chord at the end, with the last text line; “O gib acht! (o, look!),” mysteriously leads us into the forthcoming love dreams.

The last song, "Sommertage," was composed in the summer of 1908. Paul Hohenberg was Berg's schoolfriend, who had a big influence on Berg and Helene. "Days pass. When you remember those summer days in its breeze, and under the starry nights, only images fill you wholly." Hohenberg's images of those summer days are voluptuously and ardently expressed in music by Berg. Motivic device also plays an important role in this song. The four-note motive, which starts the piece, combined with half-notes and the interval of the fourth, is the basic motive (Ex. 10). Berg once again integrates this simple motive into the diatonic, chromatic and atonal context. The complexity of the linear contrapuntal technique is now much more obvious than "Die Nachtigall." It is also noticeable that Berg uses the fourth chords in many occasions, like most of his contemporary composers. In his *Harmomielehre*, Schoenberg stated on the fourth chord that :

"One must not simply see this as technical means, but that a new sound is a symbol of the 'new man' which is being expressed through it".

Ex.10



Around 1905 – 08, the same time Berg composed these songs, Schoenberg completely abandoned tonality. Unlike his teacher, Berg did not reject the use of familiar triadic harmonies in his atonal music; however, such chords have no traditional function. They are integrated with other dissonant chords in the songs by the operations of reordering and transposition. As seen in "Nacht" or "Traumgekroent," the motivic subsets from the whole-tone scale or the four-note motive dominate the entire harmonic dimension of the work. The balance between tonal confirmation and tonal denial in Berg's music affords a very flexible method of articulating the musical structure. Berg once wrote an article on Schoenberg's music. In this Article, Berg explains that the factors, that make it so difficult to understand Schoenberg's music, lie in the metrical disordering and the complexity of motivic treatment. It was always Berg's intention to organize the piece with comprehensive, symmetrical, rhythmic activities, in order to create a sense of total, organic continuity.

Schoenberg wrote in the late 1930's, after Berg's death :

"Two things emerged clearly even from Berg's earliest compositions, however awkward they may be: First, that music was to him a language, and that he really expressed himself in that language; and secondly, the overflowing warmth of feeling."

The *Seven Early Songs* are the most suggestive examples of Berg's early writing with full of warmth and Berg's personal messages. We can see his transformation from the tradition of German *Lieder* toward Schoenberg. However, as Schoenberg mentioned, it is so striking, already in this early stage, that Berg established his own musical language with full of energy and love to music.

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