

A Snapshot of the Pierrot Ensemble Today

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New York New Music Ensemble performing Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969), Merkin Hall, New York, 30 April 2007 © Nan Melville

2012 marked the centenary of Arnold Schoenberg's magnum opus, *Pierrot lunaire*. Ever since it was written, the piece has been a touchstone for an astonishing number of composers, performers, critics, musicologists, artistic directors (as we now call them) and administrators. *Pierrot's* spate of national premieres began in Berlin, with Schoenberg himself at the helm of an ensemble fronted by the work's commissioner, Albertine Zehme. The world premiere would be the first leg of a sixteen-date tour of Germany and Austria, allowing such luminaries as Richard Dehmel, Otto Klemperer and Igor Stravinsky to witness *Pierrot* first hand. At the beginning of the 1920s, *Pierrot* had not been heard anywhere since the outbreak of war, but in the space of four short years the

work's notoriety inspired premieres, revivals and tours in the United States, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, France, Belgium, Great Britain, Italy and Spain.¹

Again, the figures involved are eye-catching. Darius Milhaud conducted the French premiere of *Pierrot lunaire* in 1922 and brought two-thirds of his ensemble to London for the British premiere a year later. Edgard Varèse co-founded the International Composers' Guild (the ICG), the body responsible for the American premiere in New York, after hearing a performance of *Pierrot* in the Berlin flat of fellow composer Ferruccio Busoni.² As an ICG member, Alfredo Casella attended the New York concert, which counted Milhaud, George Enescu, Leopold Stokowski and Willem Mengelberg among its stellar audience. Casella brought *Pierrot* to Italy in 1924, and with it co-launched the *Corporazione delle Nuove Musiche*. The Florence leg of that tour attracted the old and new faces of Italian music, with a frail Giacomo Puccini and a twenty-year-old Luigi Dallapiccola in attendance. So successful was the ICG's American premiere that a follow-up concert was mooted, bringing into being a rival League of Composers for a 1925 performance attended by George Gershwin. Weeks later, *Pierrot* reached Spain, as Roberto Gerhard arranged for the *Associació de Música de Camara* to stage a *Festival de la Musica Viennesa* in Barcelona.

The story behind these performances, collectively interwoven and trans-Atlantic, continues to fascinate. This was a time when new musical cooperatives flourished and international cooperation was renewed. National fault-lines, however, did not vanish

¹ Original newspaper and journal reviews of twenty-four of *Pierrot*'s earliest performances in concerts around the world, including its Berlin premiere and Austro-German tour of 1912, are collected in *Dossier de Presse: Press-book de Pierrot lunaire d'Arnold Schönberg*, ed. François Lesure (Geneva: Minkoff, 1985), 34-93. See also Reinhold Brinkmann (ed.), *Arnold Schönberg: Sämtliche Werke, Melodramen und Lieder mit Instrumenten*, vol. 1, *Pierrot lunaire, Op. 21, Kritischer Bericht – Studien zur Genesis – Skizzen – Dokumente* (Mainz: Schott; Vienna: Universal, 1995), 234-98.

² The performance was held on 17 June 1913. Busoni had missed *Pierrot*'s premiere while touring England, so arranged this private performance himself. See Delia Couling, *Ferruccio Busoni: A Musical Ishmael* (Lanham, Md. and Oxford: Scarecrow, 2005), 267-8.

overnight. Casella and Schoenberg quarrelled after the Italian hypothesised how Schoenberg's art, 'so alien to our temperament', faced an 'unbridgeable chasm' in Italy, as though *Pierrot's* melodramas failed by the revered standards of Italian drama.³ Another "first" of *Pierrot's* reception in Italy was to reveal how the subject of Schoenberg's new and mysterious twelve-tone method would colour press coverage of his *earlier* atonal works. Schoenberg's pointed, simple reply: 'My tonality uses twelve notes instead of seven.'⁴ Across cities, countries and continents, a cycle of anticipation and reaction had already attached itself to *Pierrot lunaire*. It was a cycle that shaped the music as divisive yet momentous. Responding to the British premiere, Percy Scholes summed it up perfectly: '[*Pierrot's*] very great power ... compels respect even when it provokes dislike.'⁵

More than respect, *Pierrot* inspired action. The music's reputation preceded it, even for those still to hear the work. Within months of *Pierrot's* first tour, Maurice Ravel, hearing Stravinsky's account, had breathlessly lobbied the *Société de Musique Indépendante* to support his 'stupendous project for a scandalous concert' to grant a French premiere to the 'work for which blood is flowing in Germany and Austria'.⁶ Paris would have to wait another decade for *Pierrot*, but the work attracted a cluster of composer-conductors and

³ Alfredo Casella, 'Schoenberg in Italy', *Modern Music* 1/1 (1924), 7-8. An opinion Casella expressed in 1934, hailing the independence of the Italian national spirit, so riled Schoenberg that although a decade had passed since their tour together, he sarcastically cited *Pierrot* and Casella's *Serenata*, Op. 46 (1927), by reply. Among his rebuttals, Schoenberg illuminated the debt *Serenata* owed him, that is, how its mixed quintet of clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, violin and cello (a clear *Pierrot* take off) helped to delineate its structure timbrally (also in the manner of *Pierrot*). See Alfredo Casella, 'Modern Music in Italy', *Modern Music* 12/1 (1934), 19-20; Arnold Schoenberg, "'Fascism is No Article of Exportation'" (c. 1935) in: Joseph Auner (ed.), *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 268-75. Incidentally, Schoenberg's Mussolini-quoting article title was not meant to reflect on Casella as an individual, and it is worth remembering how the Italian's education in Paris had once established him as among the most outward looking of the post-Puccini generation.

⁴ Arnold Schoenberg, quoted in Renzo Massarini, 'Arnold Schönberg in Italy', trans. G.A. Pfister, *Sackbut* 4/12 (July, 1924), 364.

⁵ Percy Scholes, 'Music and Musicians: Mad Musicians', *The Observer* (25 November 1923), repr. in: *Dossier de Presse: Press-book de Pierrot lunaire d'Arnold Schönberg*, ed. François Lesure (Geneva: Minkoff, 1985), 165.

⁶ Ravel's designs were even grander than they first appear. His concert, which went ahead without *Pierrot* in January 1914, would originally have included 'pieces for (a) narrator; (b) and (c) voice and: piano, string quartet, 2 flutes, and 2 clarinets.' Ravel admitted that this configuration was a clear vehicle for Stravinsky's *Three Japanese Lyrics* and his own *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* – '(b) and (c)' respectively – both of which augmented *Pierrot's* line-up and were composed in its immediate aftermath. Maurice Ravel, letter to Alfredo Casella (2 April 1913) in: *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, ed. Arbie Orenstein (2nd edn., Minneola, New York: Dover, 2003), 135-36.

performer-theorists who became its ambassadors: Schoenberg, of course, and members of his circle such as Erwin Stein and Hermann Scherchen, both of whom wrote excited articles to preview revivals of *Pierrot* to be performed under their direction; Louis Fleury, *Pierrot's* flautist in Paris, London and across Italy, also fed the frenzy.⁷

Such circumstances help explain how *Pierrot lunaire* became such a musical and cultural phenomenon—one that's been freighted with all kinds of meanings in the areas in which its fame, or infamy, was gained: expressionism, music theatre, the *commedia dell'arte*, melodrama, vocalisation, instrumentation, the song cycle (or the deconstruction thereof) and satire, to name but a few. But a further consequence of this story was that even by the mid 1920s, many more musicians than the eight of Schoenberg's 1912 ensemble (in which I include his co-conductor, the young Scherchen) had performed the work. *Pierrot's* unprecedented instrumentation elevated its status as a piece that would epitomise modern music-making. Its performances obliged fresh groups of players to come together, often leading to new and enduring groups being formed on or around Schoenberg's 'Pierrot ensemble', that is, the speaking voice (or *Sprechstimme*, source of ceaseless debate on its realisation and reception) with a versatile accompaniment of flute doubling piccolo, clarinet doubling bass clarinet, piano, violin doubling viola, and cello.

Fast forward to the present day, and *Pierrot's* mixed chamber ensemble has become, in all its protean forms, a principal line-up for modern music. Dozens of groups around the world are founded on its instrumentation, the most prominent of which are the Da Capo Chamber Players, eighth blackbird and the New York New Music Ensemble in the United States, the New Music Players and Psappha in Britain, Pierrot

⁷ See, for example, Hermann Scherchen, 'Pierrot lunaire', *Neue Zeitung* (27 March 1922), 20-1 (trailing *Pierrot's* Swiss premiere held at a music college in Winterthur that year); Erwin Stein, 'The Moon-Struck Pierrot Comes to London', *Radio Times* (4 April 1930), 9 (on its performance three days later, its first in London for seven years); See Louis Fleury, 'About "Pierrot Lunaire": The Impressions Made on Various Audiences by a Novel Work', trans. Arthur H. Fox Strangways, *Music & Letters* 5/4 (October, 1924), 348.

Lunaire Ensemble Wien in Austria, Piccola Accademia degli Specchi (Little Academy of Mirrors) in Italy, and the Syzygy Ensemble in Australia. Doubtless there are literally thousands of works for Pierrot ensemble; my current catalogue of the repertory, a work in progress, runs to nearly five hundred pieces.⁸



Pierrot Lunaire Ensemble Wien, Royal Hall, Pafos, 3 August 2006 © Christos Miltiades

Something quite remarkable, then, happened between 1912 and 2012. Where once *Pierrot lunaire* stood alone in concert,⁹ composers and concert programmers later introduce companion pieces. Schoenberg would never score a second Pierrot ensemble, although he sometimes encouraged new, similar works from his former pupils, including Hanns Eisler's *Palmström*, Op. 5 (in 1924, although details of its premiere are unknown) and Webern's transcription of Schoenberg's own First Chamber Symphony, Op. 9 (in 1922-23, premiered alongside *Pierrot* in Barcelona). Significantly, the instrumentation of all three works varies. Eisler became the first composer to use the speaking voice with an

⁸ Published last year, the catalogue forms the second half of my book on the subject. See Christopher Dromey, *The Pierrot Ensembles: Chronicle and Catalogue, 1912-2012* (London: Plumbago, 2012), 207-67.

⁹ The premiere actually scheduled breaks between each of *Pierrot*'s three Acts (its *dreimal sieben Gedichte* or "three-times-seven poems).

accompaniment reminiscent of *Pierrot*, but *Palmström* omitted the piano. Webern reduced Schoenberg's lop-sided chamber symphony from its fifteen-strong force (eight woodwinds, two horns, five strings) to what some now call a 'Pierrot quintet', that is, without Pierrot's speaking voice and instrumental doubling.

This micro-lineage of Pierrot ensembles gathered pace slowly at first. A young Benjamin Britten was carving out a living in London as a film composer when he scored three British Commercial Gas Association documentaries for Pierrot ensemble in 1935.¹⁰ Five years later, Eisler wrote his second Pierrot ensemble (like Britten's, for film), *Vierzehn Arten den Regen zu beschreiben* (*Fourteen Ways of Describing Rain*), Op. 70, subtly changing the line-up once more by requiring no doubling between parts and scoring the violin and viola parts separately, though they never sound together. Indeed, it was not unknown for *Pierrot* to be performed by six instrumentalists, with a separate violinist and violist, around this period.¹¹ These ties to performance history affected Britten, who heard *Pierrot* broadcast from London in 1930 and saw it live there in 1933, as much as they did Elisabeth Lutyens, the next British composer of a Pierrot ensemble. Her *Concertante for Five Players*, Op. 22 (1950) was almost certainly inspired by Eisler's *Vierzehn Arten*, which she heard at the 1949 ISCM Festival in Palermo.

A select few categories of Pierrot ensemble have since become standard. In all, I have identified twelve subcategories (see Appendix). Some of these, for various geographical and aesthetic reasons, have evolved to become more popular, more standard, than others. The *Concertante* and *Vierzehn Arten* belong to the fourth category:

¹⁰ Britten's scores are *Dinner Hour* (for fl, cl, pf, perc, vn, vc), *Men Behind the Meters* (fl, cl (later ob), pf, perc, vn, vc) and 'Title Music III', probably for the film *How Gas is Made* (fl, cl, pf, perc, vn, vc). For more on these works, see Christopher Dromey, 'Benjamin Britten's "Pierrot" Ensembles', in *British Music and Modernism, 1895-1960*, ed. Matthew Riley (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 219-47.

¹¹ Nor is it unknown today: the American Pierrot ensemble Lunatics at Large are pictured performing *Pierrot* as an instrumental sextet towards the end of this article.

voiceless while retaining an element of doubling—and in general the contentious *Sprechstimme* would, over the years, prove dispensable to most composers, if not to musicologists. The Pierrot quintet (cat. v.) is well represented: a streamlined, portable, economic version of Schoenberg's line-up that has flourished, especially in recent years. The way Webern configured the quintet, as a fixed line-up of flute, clarinet, piano, viola and cello, is typical, although there are exceptions: Peter Maxwell Davies's *Unbroken Circle* (1984) and Colin Matthews's *Elegiac Chaconne* (1997) are both scored for alto flute, bass clarinet, piano, viola and cello: a "reversal" of timbre very similar to the way Schoenberg scored the macabre 'Rote Messe' in *Pierrot lunaire* (for piccolo rather than alto flute) as well as—little-known fact—the end of 'O alter duft', *Pierrot's* final number. In other words, it is possible, and may be beneficial, to subdivide some of these categories to illustrate in even greater detail how composers after Schoenberg came to view his ensemble.

The most famous tale to tell, however, is also the most obvious: the sixth category, substituting the voice for percussion, as Britten had in the mid 1930s, is by far the most popular medium. The real turning point came three decades later, or 1967 to be precise, when the British composers Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle and a group of likeminded musicians, including a percussionist, debuted the Pierrot Players (1967-70). Their breakthrough was significant enough, with regular performances of *Pierrot*, new works for Pierrot ensemble written within the group (Davies's *Antechrist* and Birtwistle's *Cantata*, for example), and others commissioned beyond (such as Morton Feldman's *viola in my life*). All within three years. But the group's longevity is equally important for the sheer number of pieces it generated. Historically, Davies has tended to take most of the credit for this: Birtwistle left the group in 1970 and the Pierrot Players were renamed The Fires of London (1970-87). The Fires' international stature grew as

they toured Europe, Australia and the Americas and collaborated with the likes of Elliott Carter, Peter Sculthorpe, Henze, Michael Finnissy and Pierre Boulez. The new group's line-up would be subjected to greater variation than before, as Davies and dozens of other composers tinkered with 'The Fires' instrumentation. Where once the harpsichord or honky-tonk piano was used to extend Schoenberg's ploy of doubling instruments or to replace the piano altogether, now sporadic appearances of the guitar and, later, the marimba adorned the Pierrot ensemble. Hence, the aesthetic and timbre of the two most influential Pierrot ensembles around this time, Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (of 1969) and *Ave Maris Stella* (six years later), are so different.

As scholars awoke to this phenomenon, so the 'Pierrot ensemble' gradually entered the lexicon of music criticism to describe such pieces, as well as the groups that perform them. In fact, the term was hardly used at all until the mid-to-late 1970s. In British journals we witness Arnold Whittall using it to review Maxwell Davies's *Miss Donnitborne's Maggot* in 1978, and Paul Griffiths noticing the similarity of several Pierrot quintets three years later.¹² I decided the term warranted research a decade ago, and in 2007 'Pierrot ensemble' gained its own, albeit short, Wikipedia entry (surely the seal of approval for any once obscure subject!). More recently, as *Pierrot's* centenary approached, the blogosphere debated the pros and cons of the ensemble, largely from an American perspective given the medium's popularity there since the late twentieth century.¹³ As Steven Mackey puts it, the Pierrot ensemble in mid-1980s America was the 'ubiquitous "mod-music" group'.¹⁴ More recently, Steve Reich overcame his instinctive objections to

¹² See Arnold Whittall, '[Review of] *Miss Donnitborne's Maggot* and *Symphony*', *Music & Letters* 59/4 (October, 1978), 517; Paul Griffiths, '[Review of] *Tenebrae super Gesualdo* by Davies, *Incredible Floridas* by Meale, *Arie da capo* by Babbitt, *Après 'D'un désastre obscur'* by Amy', *Musical Times*, 122/1657 (March, 1981), 187.

¹³ See, for example, Lane Harder, 'The Pierrot Ensemble: Are We Through? Shouldn't We Be?', <http://whatmusicisdotcom.wordpress.com/2011/06/08/the-pierrot-ensemble-are-we-through-shouldnt-we-be/>; Will Robin, 'Moondrunk for a Century: A History of the Pierrot Ensemble', <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/moondrunk/>; Kyle Gann, 'Pas mon ami Pierrot', <http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/2012/07/pas-mon-ami-pierrot.html> (accessed 21 January 2013).

¹⁴ The full quotation reads: 'When I was a young composer in the mid-eighties the so-called Pierrot

the line-up—‘I can’t write for an ensemble like ... *Pierrot lunaire*, that’s not me.’—by scoring his Pulitzer prize-winning *Double Sextet* (2007) for a Pierrot ensemble against its pre-recorded self.¹⁵ It’s a clever solution, making provision for the unison canons that are so important to Reich’s style, and offering a new example of how the Pierrot ensemble can withstand novel variations to its identity.

Remaining in the United States, we shall now hear, and contextualise, three more twenty-first-century works for Pierrot ensemble. Intriguingly, few works for Pierrot ensemble have emulated Schoenberg’s original line-up (cat. i.). The use of voice at all is not very common, even in works where percussion is added (as in cat. iii.). Davies’s *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, which casts King George III as its alienated protagonist (rather than Pierrot), is a glorious exception: a rare example of taxonomy and aesthetic overlapping to suggest something genre-based at play. John Zorn’s *Chimeras* (2001) belongs to the same medium. Here we are faced with single strings, doubled clarinets, tripled keyboards and quadrupled flutes. Its structure is *Pierrot*-esque, being divided into two ‘books’ of six movements of various permutations of timbre.¹⁶ Moreover, Zorn’s vocal lines, while wordless and sung, invite comparison with the way *Pierrot lunaire* “absorbs” into its textural fabric the expressive and illustrative qualities of its text. (This relationship between voice and ensemble, so important in *Pierrot*, probably explains Zorn’s title.) The fact that each of *Chimeras*’s twelve movements avoid a particular pitch, and that these

ensemble ... was the ubiquitous “mod-music” group. It has a certain economic appeal in that you get a little of everything but because of that, every concert you went to had pieces by students and teachers wrestling with this Spartan orchestra in a post-Schoenbergian expressionist idiom. I ... felt the need to transform the ensemble into something else, something more sympathetic to my background and interests, something more lively. In *Micro-Concerto*, the featured role of the percussionist playing a combination of toys, kitchen utensils and “legit” instruments makes the ensemble a little more playful.’ Steven Mackey, note on *Micro-Concerto for Percussion and Five Instruments* [solo perc with fl, cl, pf, vn, vc] (1999, written for the New York New Music Ensemble), <http://stevenmackey.com/composer> (accessed 7 September 2012). See also notes 22 and 23.

¹⁵ Steve Reich, interview with Tim Munro, <http://www.eighthblackbird.org/projects/toomt> (accessed 10 January 2013). The alternative scoring for *Double Sextet* simply requires two Pierrot ensembles [fl, cl, pf, vib, vn, vc, pre-recorded tape (of fl, cl, pf, vib, vn, vc) or 2 fl, 2 cl, 2 pf, 2 vib, 2 vn, 2 vc].

¹⁶ John Zorn, sleeve-notes to *John Zorn: Chimeras* (Tzadik, TZ 7085; 2003), pages unnumbered.

twelve pitches in succession make up what is generally regarded to be the first tone row Schoenberg ever utilised, underlines the work's high level of symbolic and aesthetic homage. ['Eleven', *Chimeras's* penultimate number, was heard at this point.] Thirteen years on from the turn of the century, it is relatively safe to conclude that retro-modernist attitudes, often couched in a polylliterate musical language, form one important and flourishing strain of contemporary creativity. The pointillism of *Chimeras* and its nod to 1960s-style avant-gardism makes Zorn's piece a case in point. It is no surprise, then, that the composer enlisted Fred Sherry to help record the work, for in 1971 Sherry co-founded Speculum Musicae, a twelve-piece group that often performed *Pierrot lunaire*, and which, together with Da Capo Chamber Players and The Fires of London (sic), helped proliferate the Pierrot ensemble in the United States. Carter and Feldman I have mentioned; Joan Towers, Mario Davidovsky, John Harbison, Donald Martino, Arthur Berger, Robert Kyr, Ronald Caltabiano and many other American composers also wrote works for Pierrot ensemble around this time.

Instrumentally, Mercedes Zavala's *La Apoteosis Nocturna de Andoar* (2001) is scored similarly to *Chimeras*, although her approach to the ensemble is quite different. In my discussions on the Pierrot ensemble with composers, an issue often raised is the challenge the line-up's range and mixed timbres presents as they (and their pupils) "slide" between polyphony and homophony.¹⁷ This perhaps explains why the ensemble is such a useful pedagogical tool. It is also evident, beyond such anecdotes, that part of the attraction of mixed ensembles is their capacity to release musical thought into line and counterpoint—escaping the apparent confines of the more harmonically-orientated string quartet or piano-singer duo. This is relevant to Zavala's Pierrot ensemble, which makes a feature of its polyphonic potential, as we shall hear. [An extract from *La*

¹⁷ Kyle Gann makes a similar point in his aforementioned blog. See note 13.

Apoteosis Nocturna de Andoar was played at this point.] A highly stratified texture, strongly rhythmicised phrases, and a difficult percussion part influenced by *djembe* and *saba* techniques fashion an introduction that, in Zavala's words, 'is conceived as a piece that could be choreographed.'¹⁸ Note category 11: several works for Pierrot ensemble *are* akin to small-scale ballets, an innovation Birtwistle had predicted but which Davies inaugurated with *Vesalii icones* (1969), a sober work based formally and conceptually on the Stations of the Cross.¹⁹

A Spanish connection inspired the third work for Pierrot ensemble we shall hear, Tansy Davies's *Grind Show (electric)* (2003, an 'unplugged' version was published five years later). Davies—no relation to Peter Maxwell Davies—describes the piece as an 'imaginary journey into the heart of a painting by Goya: the Pilgrimage of St Isadore.' The music superimposes a bawdy dance hall (hence the irregular dances of the instruments) and a rainy landscape at night (the electronics). Davies may mirror Goya, but equally relevant is her Pierrot ensemble, a Pierrot quintet with a prepared piano and backgrounded CD samples) and the *commedia dell'arte* implications of her slightly sinister 'carnavalesque' music. This is the performance marking, and atmosphere, of the opening [which was heard at this point]. Davies's is a very individual, very twenty-first-century take on the Pierrot ensemble. Her musical style often discloses the influence of popular culture, something she shares with several of her young British peers: Thomas Adès, Gabriel Prokofiev (grandson of Sergei), Joby Talbot, to name but three. Filtered through Goya, *Grind Show* nevertheless taps in to the traditions of the Pierrot ensemble in three ways. First, its use of Pierrot ensemble with electronics or tape (cat. x): 1960s Pierrot ensembles by Davidovsky (*Synchronisms No. 2*), Justin Connolly (*Obbligati II*) and Birtwistle

¹⁸ Mercedes Zavala, email communication with the author, 10 December 2013.

¹⁹ 'To our singer, speaker and players, we hope eventually to add a dancer.' Harrison Birtwistle, quoted in: Noel Goodwin, 'Music in London: Pierrot Players', *Musical Times* 108/1493 (July, 1967), 626. It is also noteworthy that Ballet Rambert famously added Glen Tetley's choreographed *Pierrot lunaire* (1962) to their repertory in 1967.

(*Medusa*) did likewise. Second, in the line of *Pierrot*, *Grind Show*'s stylised debauchery has a familiar ring about it, from the semi-allegorical grotesqueries of *Pierrot lunaire* itself, through Maxwell Davies's theatrical resurrection of similar themes (often blended with religion or madness), to Henze's use of the Pierrot ensemble alongside percussion, brass and jazz ensembles in *Der langwierige Weg in die Wohnung der Natascha Ungebeuer* (1971)—Henze's Pierrot ensemble part-dressed in bloodstained hospital garb, part-dressed in Pierrot costumes, to represent the 'sickness of the bourgeoisie, its music, its morality.'²⁰ In such a context, *Grind Show*'s dark, subversive potential is easier to grasp.



Lunatics at Large with Katharine Dain performing Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, Op. 12 (1912), Symphony Space, New York, 18 May 2009 © Rachel Papo

The Pierrot ensemble, then, is divisible into several subcategories, having undergone a century of formation, variation and continuation. As *Pierrot lunaire* enters its second century, it is obvious that the work has endured and that its conditions of

²⁰ 'The significance of the two types of costume points to one thing: sickness, the sickness of the bourgeoisie, its music, its morality ... What they have to say has its origins in Schoenberg's construct, but has departed from it and broken with it, beyond the point of parody towards a new kind of denunciatory analytical music exercise.' Hans Werner Henze, *Music and Politics: Collected Writings 1953-81* (London: Faber, 1982), 191.

performance continue to vary. Certainly, its shock is dampened in “concert” presentation (theatrical, costumed performances, with the instrumentalists hidden behind a screen, the conditions of *Pierrot’s* premiere, are far rarer). But however hidden, and however ironically they are understood, the excesses of its make-believe world, its moonstruck journeys through fantasy, blasphemy, nostalgia and violence, rarely fail to intrigue: Pierrot acting the priest to serve his own heart for Communion in ‘Rote Messe’, boring open Cassander’s skull to smoke tobacco from it in ‘Gemeinheit’ five numbers later—no single feature of this bizarre and blackly comic work can entirely explain its draw. At the same time, it is clear that music written for conventional chamber-music groupings has become increasingly rare since the early twentieth century. The preference of composers for more colourful, heterogeneous types of ensemble has proved inexorable. Because of these tendencies, the Pierrot ensemble’s line-up could be popular but never absolutely fixed—hence the overwhelming number of Pierrot ensembles that deviate in some way from Schoenberg’s prototype. While the idea of doubling, tripling and even quadrupling the ensemble’s winds took hold as alto and bass flutes, contrabass and basset clarinets, recorders, saxophones and even ocarinas entered the fray, the violin and viola were as likely to have been un-doubled, or to have had one instrument dropped altogether, as they were to be doubled in the manner of *Pierrot*—not forgetting guitars, dancers, electronics and other adornments to the ensemble.

(Maxwell) Davies had a profound effect on the line-up, encouraging us to appreciate it as a genre by resurrecting its potential in music theatre, and arguably usurping *Pierrot* at particular points in particular countries. If this sounds outlandish, then consider the reputation of the *Eight Songs*, as well as its relationship with subsequent pieces: Henze and Zorn we have discussed; Davies himself wrote a companion piece to it, *Miss Donnithorne’s Maggot*; and in 2005 Paul Dresher scored *The Tyrant* for the same line-

up and with similar staging. Has the ‘Pierrot’ ensemble become the ‘Mad King’ ensemble? The pluralistic, categorising approach I adopt suggests, in one sense, that it has, even if such works technically comprise a subgenre within the Pierrot ensemble medium.²¹ Besides, it would be quite unnatural for *Pierrot*, however chameleonic its content and performance history, forever to exemplify features that were to become typical of the “class” of Pierrot ensembles. Thus *Pierrot* remains a prototype, for it spawned a vast lineage of Pierrot ensembles of comparable multiformity. And just as some composers today come to the line-up not through Schoenberg,²² but through any of the active Pierrot ensembles across the world, musicologists have begun to do likewise.²³ What we currently lack is a joined-up understanding of the ensemble: surveying a greater number of works, exploring its effects on local concert scenes, codifying the medium in global terms. My ‘snapshot’ is just that. Speaking of a “Fires sextet” today, for example, probably means little outside Britain, however great that group’s legacy. But the Pierrot ensembles’ diversity, versatility, heritage and, above all, their proliferation and new-music-friendliness, have made it so.

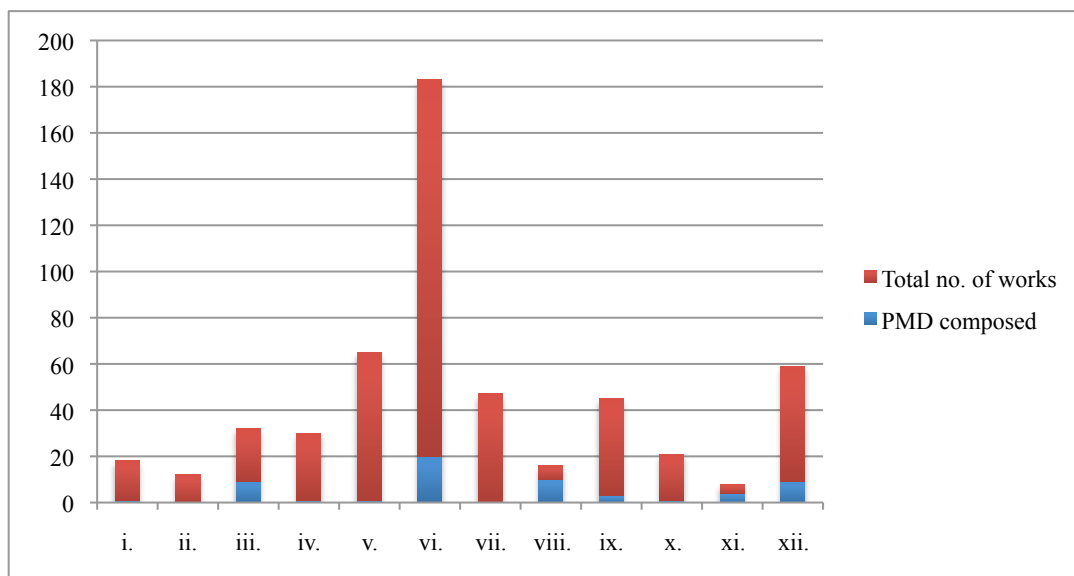
²¹ For more on the relationship between the Pierrot ensemble medium and genre, see Dromey, *The Pierrot Ensembles: Chronicle and Catalogue, 1912-2012*, 10-15.

²² Michael Torke, who wrote two pieces for Pierrot ensemble while still a student, makes an aesthetically credible denial of ever having studied *Pierrot* before writing *Ceremony of Innocence* (1983) and *The Telephone Book* (1985-95). His view of the line-up is that it was ‘very common, easily assembled and so playable everywhere. ... That cluster of instruments ... seemed everywhere in the mid eighties.’ Michael Torke, email communication with the author, 5 February 2004.

²³ See, for example, Matthew Coley, *Pierrot Plus Percussion: A Trend Shaping Contemporary Chamber Music and Percussion Repertoire* (D.M. diss., Northwestern University, Evanston, IL., forthcoming).

Appendix – Categorising the Pierrot ensemble

- i) voice(s) and Pierrot ensemble, with instrumental doubling
- ii) without doubling
- iii) with percussion, irrespective of doubling
- iv) without voice, with instrumental doubling
- v) without voice, without doubling a.k.a. Pierrot quintet
- vi) without voice, with percussion
- vii) violin and viola undoubled
- viii) with guitar, banjo or mandolin
- ix) with piano omitted or substituted for percussion and/or harp
- x) with tape, multimedia or electronics
- xi) with dancers and/or other extramusical characters
- xii) with miscellaneous additions



- i) voice(s) and Pierrot ensemble, with instrumental doubling
 - e.g. Ferneyhough, *On Stellar Magnitudes* (1994) [mez, fl/pic, cl/bcl, pf, vn, vc]
 - Schoenberg, *Pierrot lunaire*, Op. 21 (1912) [Sprechstimme, fl/pic, B₁-cl/A-cl/bcl, pf, vn/va, vc]
- ii) without doubling
 - e.g. Berio, *O King* (1967-68) [mez, fl, cl, pf, vn, vc]
- iii) with percussion, irrespective of doubling
 - e.g. Birtwistle, *Cantata* (1969) [sop, fl/pic, high-pitched-cl ('Old Eng. pitch'), pf/cel, glock, vn/va, vc]
 - Davies (P.M.), *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969) [male voice (bar), fl/pic, cl, pf/hpd/dulcimer, perc, vn, vc]
 - Zorn, *Chimeras* (2001) [2 sop, fl/afl/bfl/pic, cl/bcl, pf/cel/org, perc, vn, vc]
- iv) without voice, with instrumental doubling
 - e.g. Babbitt, *Arie da capo* (1973-74) [fl, cl/bcl, pf, vn, vc]

Eisler, *Vierzehn Arten den Regen zu beschreiben* (1940-41) [fl, cl, pf, vn, va, vc – vn+va do not sound together]
Lutyens, *Concertante for Five Players* (1950) [fl/pic, cl/bcl, pf, vn/va, vc]

v) without voice, without doubling a.k.a. Pierrot quintet

e.g. Finnissy, *Regen beschreiben* (2001) [afl, cl, pf, vn, vc]
Webern, *Kammersymphonie (arr. of Arnold Schoenberg, Op. 9)* (1922-23) [fl (or vn), cl (or va), pf, vn, vc]

vi) without voice, with percussion

e.g. Andriessen, *Zilver* (1994) [fl, cl, pf, 2 perc (vib, mar), vn, vc]
Boulez, *Dérive [I]* (1984) [fl, A-cl, pf, vib, vn, vc]
Carter, *Triple Duo [Free Fantasy]* (1982-83) [fl/pic, B_b-cl/E_b-cl/bcl, pf, perc, va, vc]
Davies (P.M.), *Ave Maris Stella* (1975) [fl/afl, A-cl (or basset-cl), pf, mar, va, vc]
Halfpiter, *Oda para felicitar a un amigo* (1969) [afl, bcl, pf/cel, perc, va, vc]
Martino, *Notturmo* (1973) [fl/afl/pic, cl/bcl, pf, perc, vn/va, vc]
Reich, *Double Sextet* (2007) [fl, cl, pf, vib, vn, vc, pre-recorded tape or 2 fl, 2 cl, 2 pf, 2 vib, 2 vn, 2 vc]
Xenakis, *Plektó* (1993) [fl, cl, pf, 5 woodblocks/7 drums, vn, vc]

vii) violin and viola undoubled

e.g. Feldman, *The viola in my life (2)* (1970) [fl, cl, cel, perc, vn, va, vc = va with fl, cl, cel, perc, vn, va, vc]

viii) with guitar, banjo or mandolin

e.g. Davies (P.M.), *Tenebrae super Gesualdo* (1972) [mez, afl, bcl, hpd/cel/chamber org, mar/glock, gui, vn/va, vc]

ix) with piano omitted or substituted for percussion and/or harp

e.g. Berio, *Folk Songs* (1964) [mez, fl/pic, cl, hp, 2 perc, va, vc]
Davies (P.M.), *Antechrist* (1967) [pic, bcl, 2 or 3 perc, vn, vc]
Eisler, *Palmström: Studien über Zwölfton-Reihen* (1924) [Sprechstimme, fl/pic, A-cl, vn/va, vc]

x) with tape, multimedia or electronics

e.g. Davies (Tansy), *grind show (electric or unplugged)* (2007) [fl, cl, pf (prepared), vn, vc, CD samples]
Murail, *Winter Fragments* (2000) [fl, cl, pf, vn, vc, Apple Mac, MIDI keyb, amplification, reverb]

xi) with dancers and/or other extramusical characters

e.g. Davies (P.M.), *Vesalii icones* (1969) [dancer/honky-tonk-pf, fl/afl/pic, basset-cl (or A-cl),
pf/out-of-tune-autoharp/music-box ('unsuitable' tune)/etc., perc (glock/xylo/etc.), va, vc]

xii) with miscellaneous additions

e.g. Britten, *Men Behind the Meters* (1935) [fl, cl (later ob), pf, perc, vn, vc]
Davies (P.M.), *Suite from "The Boy Friend" (most arr. of Sandy Wilson)* (1971) [fl, cl, bcl, 4 sax, 2 tpt, trb, tb, 2 perc,
banjo, uke/mand, hp, 2 keyb (pf/cel/autoharp (or zither), pf/tamb/scraper inside pf), str (single or multiple)]
Dench, *light-strung sigils* (2002) [ampl. rec with fl/afl/pic, cl/cbcl, pf, perc, vn, vc]
Falla, *Concerto* (1923-26) [fl, ob, cl, hpd (or pf), vn, vc = hpd (or pf) with fl, ob, cl, vn, vc]
Henze, *Der langwierige Weg in die Wohnung der Natascha Ungeheuer* (1971) [solo bar, solo perc with Pierrot, jazz and
brass ensembles, Hammond org = bar, fl/pic, B@-cl/E@-cl/bcl, hn, 2 tpt, trb, jazz ens. (fl, ocarina (ampl), bcl, sax,
trb, 2 perc, db), pf, Hammond org, perc (timbales/flexaphone/etc.) vn/va (ampl), vc (ampl), tape]