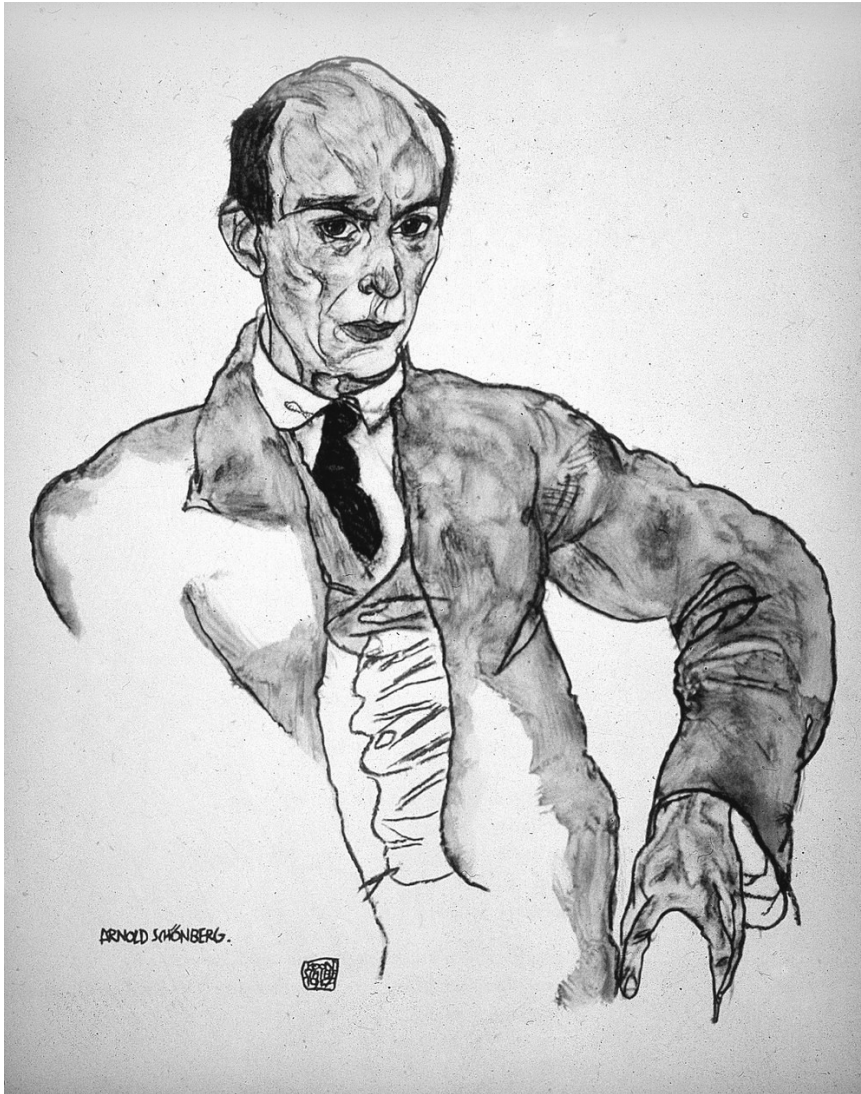


Music on the Stage

10. In Smaller Packages



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November 20, 2024

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG AND IGOR STRAVINSKY were responsible for two of the largest works in the years prior to WW1: *Gurrelieder* and *The Rite of Spring*. Yet within a couple of years each had composed quasi-theatrical pieces for altogether smaller forces: *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), which calls for seven performers, and *The Soldier's Tale* (1918), which requires eight. Although their direct descendants were few, these two works gave permission for many others that were short in length, modest in scale, and unconventional in genre. If not the parents of a new generation, they were at least the godfathers.

One such godchild was *Façade* (1922), an entertainment concocted by William Walton to poems by Edith Sitwell; it will be the third featured work in our first hour. In the second hour, I shall play portions of six other works written over the next half-century, and invite you to comment on their kinship to one or other of the original two. *rb.*

A. Two Big Losers: Schoenberg

Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* is a setting of 21 poems by the Belgian Symbolist Albert Giraud, in German translation. It calls for 6 players (flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano) and an actress/speaker, whose part is notated precisely as regards rhythm and even pitch, in a texture that Schoenberg called *Sprechstimme*.

Schoenberg: *Pierrot Lunaire*, 1 (Lotte Betts-Dean, The Manchester Collective)

Schoenberg: *Pierrot Lunaire*, 11–14 (Hila Baggio, The Israeli Chamber Project)

B. Two Big Losers: Stravinsky

Created to a text by Swiss writer Charles Ferdinand Ramuz (1878–1947), *L'histoire du Soldat* is a folk tale about the Devil, a Princess, and a common soldier. It is told in rhyming verse by one to three speakers, accompanied by an ensemble of clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, percussion, violin, and double bass. The role of the Princess can also be taken by a dancer.

Stravinsky: *The Soldier's Tale*, excerpts (Benjamin Luxon, narrator)

Stravinsky: *The Soldier's Tale*, wakening of the Princess (1964 film with Svetlana Beriosova, Robert Helpmann, and Brian Phelan)

C. An English Eccentric

William Walton worked with the eccentric English aristocrat Edith Sitwell to present 22 of her poems declaimed through a megaphone over a small instrumental group that reflects their kaleidoscopic colors and enhances their almost-abstract use of rhythm and assonance.

Walton: *Façade*, excerpts (Barbara Hannigan and Simon Rattle)

Walton: *Façade*, excerpts (Barbara Hannigan with various other soloists at the Ojai Festival, 2019)

D. Godchildren

• Telling the story of a farm boy who falls in love with a gypsy girl but then loses her, Leos Janacek's *Diary of One Who Disappeared* (1917) is a song-cycle about lost love, like the great cycles by Schubert and Schumann. But it has some quite unusual features.

Janacek: *Diary of One Who Disappeared*, excerpt (Andrew Goodwin, Jessica O'Donoghue; Sydney Chamber Opera)

• Two short instrumental passages: the fugue from Darius Milhaud's ballet *The Creation of the World* from 1923, and the opening of Stravinsky's *Dumbarton Oaks* concerto of 1938; what do they have in common?

Milhaud: *La création du monde*, fugue (Julien Masmondet)

Stravinsky: *Dumbarton Oaks*, opening (Simon Rattle, Berlin SO)

• *The Seven Deadly Sins* is the last work Kurt Weill wrote with Bert Brecht before fleeing Germany in 1933. Like other Brecht works, it is a social satire, but Weill calls for the unusual combination of jazz orchestra, male-voice quartet, and a protagonist split into singing and dancing *alter egos*.

Weill: *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Lust (Opera North)

• Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge commissioned Aaron Copland to write a ballet for Martha Graham for 1944 performance at her auditorium at the Library of Congress. Necessarily small in scale, it has become a classic.

Copland/Graham: *Appalachian Spring*, excerpt (Graham Dance Co.)

• Peter Maxwell Davies wrote *Eight Songs for a Mad King* in 1969 for the Pierrot Ensemble, a group he founded to further the possibilities of the instrumentation of *Pierrot Lunaire*. The text by Randolph Stow is about the madness of King George III.

Maxwell Davies: *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, 5 and 6 (Kelvin Thomas, Psappha Ensemble)

Bertolt **Brecht** (1898–1956, *German dramatist*), Aaron **Copland** (1900–90, *American composer*), Albert **Giraud** (1860–1929, **Belgian poet**), Martha **Graham** (1894–1991, *American choreographer*), Leos **Janacek** (1854–1928, *Czech composer*), Sir Peter **Maxwell Davies** (1934–2016, *English composer*), Darius **Milhaud** (1892–1974, *French composer*), Charles Ferdinand **Ramuz** (1878–1947, *Swiss writer*), Arnold **Schoenberg** (1874–1951, *Austrian-American composer*), Dame Edith **Sitwell** (1887–1964, *English poet*), Igor **Stravinsky** (1882–1971, *Russian-American composer*), Sir William **Walton** (1902–83, *English composer*), Kurt **Weill** (1900–1950, *German-American composer*)

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