

## ALBAN BERG – CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA *IN MEMORY OF AN ANGEL*

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**Abstract:** *The concerto bears this subtitle from the tragic event (becoming itself ominous, which will determine Berg to interrupt his work on the opera Lulu with whose orchestration he was concerned): the death of the young Manon Gropius (daughter of Alma Mahler), which has deeply marked the composer. In less than three months he composes the Concerto for violin and orchestra dedicated to this young woman, dead at the age of 18. Alban Berg's concerto has a two parts form: I - Andante, II - Allegro, each part being in turn subdivided into two parts: I = Andante and Allegretto and II = Allegro and Adagio. This "binomial" symbol is met in the antinomic presentation of the dodecaphonic series of the concerto. Part One of the Concerto for violin and orchestra by Alban Berg, is divided into sections: Andante and Allegretto (scherzando). The second part of the concerto is divided into two sections that are also played without interruption: Allegro (bars 1-135) and Adagio (bars 136-230). The allegro of the second part, in triple meter (3/4), starts in sff and fortissimo on an ensemble chord.. The orchestra, organised on groups of instruments, with solo interventions, reveals a transparent texture. The solo bass clarinet sustains the low voice, on jumps over major seventh, minor ninth and minor sixth intervals, on which the violas and the bassoon overlap in harmonic intervals. The last four sounds of the series: B - C sharp - E flat - F (9,10,11,12) form a sequence of whole steps and represent the beginning Choral of the Cantata No. 60 - O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort by Bach.*

**Key words:** *concerto, series principle, orchestration, triple meter, sixtysecond.*

### 1. Introduction

One of the most original composers, representative of the Second Viennese School, **Alban Berg** (1885-1935) has shown a great flexibility in addressing the modern musical language by merging the serial technique with modal, functional and tonality elements, aiming at musical

expression. In support of this statement is the work that the Austrian composer will write in 1935, shortly before his untimely end: ***Concerto for Violin and Orchestra - In memory of an angel.***

The concerto bears this subtitle from the tragic event (becoming itself ominous, which will determine Berg to interrupt his work on the opera Lulu with whose

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orchestration he was concerned): the death of the young Manon Gropius (daughter of Alma Mahler), which has deeply marked the composer. In less than three months he composes the Concerto for violin and orchestra dedicated to this young woman, dead at the age of 18.[2, p. 367]

Alban Berg's concerto has a *two parts* form: I - *Andante*, II - *Allegro*, each part being in turn subdivided into two parts: I = *Andante* and *Allegretto* and II = *Allegro* and *Adagio*. This "binomial" symbol is met in the antinomic presentation of the dodecapronic series of the concerto: G, B flat, D, F sharp, A, C, E, G sharp, B, C sharp, D sharp, E sharp. It can be seen that on the sounds G - B flat - D (1,2,3) and A - C - E (5,6,7) there are two minor chords and the sounds D - F sharp - A (3,4,5) and E - G sharp - B natural (7,8,9) form two major chords. The dodecapronic series is played by the solo violin in its real state (bars 15-27) then reversed.<sup>2)</sup>

The last four sounds of the series: B - C sharp - E flat - F (9,10,11,12) form a sequence of whole steps and represent the beginning Choral of the *Cantata No. 60 - O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort*, by Bach, which appears in the second part of the concerto:

(Solovioline)

ter o - no! He - tr, wenn' es dir ge - fällt, so  
span - ne mich doch aus! Mein Je - sus kommt Nun gu - te Nacht, o  
Welt! Ich fahr' ins Himmels - haus, Ich fahr' te - si - cher hin mit Frie - den,  
gro - ßer Jam - mer bleibt dar - nie - den Es ist ge - nug! Es ist ge - nug!

The concerto has a symphonic feature and it is designed on the technical *series principle*. At its core lies a series of 12 colour tones that will be rendered by the solo violin, after a brief introduction of arpeggios on fifths of the orchestra: *Andante* – *Allegretto*

To the main, serial theme, two other thematic ideas are added, in organic connection with the idea of the concerto; the first thematic idea has a popular character, written in the spirit of the Viennese folklore (first appears in the coda of the first part - bar 214):

and the second thematic idea is based on a Protestant Choral *Es ist genug* and it appears in the second part (bar 136 ff), belonging to the composer Johann Rudolph Ahle, from Thuringia, and later harmonized by J. S. Bach in the Choral at the end of the *Cantata no. 60 - O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort*. The first 4 sounds of the Choral - are based on an anhemitonic scale (without semitone) and mark the last 4 sounds of the dodecapronic series on which Berg builds the entire concerto 2. Stylistic references and analytical discussion

**Part One** of the *Concerto for violin and orchestra* by Alban Berg, is divided into sections: *Andante* and *Allegretto* (*scherzando*).

The first section - *Andante* – has a three parts form: A - B - A begins with an

*Introduction* made up of 10 bars, in which the harp and the clarinet render arpeggios of fifths, taken over by the solo violin, on the same pedal (B flat) of the bass clarinet. The score bears the composer's indications, carefully specified in terms of modulation and highlighting the expressive moments, change of tempo. The moment when the solo violin arpeggios series is presented takes place between bars 11-37.[1]

The orchestra, organised on groups of instruments, with solo interventions, reveals a transparent texture. The solo bass clarinet sustains the low voice, on jumps over major seventh, minor ninth and minor sixth intervals, on which the violas and the bassoon overlap in harmonic intervals (major thirds, perfect fourths and fifths), then taking a syncopated rhythm, jumps over minor and major sevenths, while the solo violin interprets the basic series:

The seventh chords and the attack chords on syncopated rhythm combine, in the orchestra, with melodic and harmonic intervals, all altered. According to the composer, he tries here to indicate, using musical and instrumental means, the young

Manon Gropius's trajectory of life, in the memory of whom the concerto is composed.

Section *B - un poco grazioso* (bars 38-83), brings technical effects using the violin (*flautando*) on anhemitonic trichord melodic segments and jump over reduced sixth, on triplets rhythmic formulas:

The *Andante* shows the fine texture of the solo violin and the *ostinato*, sometimes strongly expressed, of the orchestra. The violin carries out its part with *rubato* passages. It keeps the composed binary meter. The orchestra combines the slow pace with triplets' rhythmic jumps with chromatic chords. The solo part is precipitated by the chromatic pace on sextolets rhythmic formulas. Despite its complexity, the overall writing is very clear. The dynamic modulations become increasingly diverse. The exceptional divisions, on sixtysecond notes (in octuplets formulas) show the violin technique at a maximum. All of these are combined with the *tremollo* and the exceptional divisions present in the orchestra score. *Tempo I* (bars 84-103) indicate the repeat (A1). The repeat is much diminished (it starts in G minor) and ends by the new interpretation of the introductory part. The second section of the first part, *Allegretto*, is preceded by a short transition.

The *Allegretto (scherzando)* - is made up in the form of a scherzo with two trios: *A* (bars 104-136) - *B* (bars 137-154 and represent the *quasi trio I*) - *C* (bars 155-166, *trio II*) - *B* (bars 167-172, *trio I* shortened) - *A* (bars 173-257). The section begins with a *Phrygian* on D minor on the orchestra (clarinet and strings in *pizzicato*) with a rhythmic and melodic formula that imposes the feature of this section with the status of "leit motive". It anticipates, however, the dominant feature of this section and the emergence of the Viennese folklore influenced theme.

The instrumental ensemble of strings, together with the horns and the bassoon interpret a melodic-harmonic segment in the Viennese folklore spirit. The segment is taken over by the solo violin and transposed into an imitative style.

The flute and the oboe, with the chromatic accompaniment of the cellos, express jumps over minor and major thirds, melodic fragments in the same Viennese spirit. Every change in tempo or in dynamics (specification of the interpretative expression of the instruments) is accurately marked in the score. The changes in tempo are very frequent, with accelerations and subsequent slacks, according to the musical expression. The solo violin is integrated into the symphonic discourse.

*Subito un poco energico* (bar 137) introduces a new section, *Quasi Trio I*, where the solo violin interprets, in major melodic jumps, thirteenth chords, altered tenths and elevenths with complex technique (double markings).

*Trio II* - is expressed by a slower motion - *Meno mosso*; the orchestra (the flute, then the trumpet on strings background) then the violin are required to interpret with great expressiveness. Bars 167-172 bring a shortened version of the *Trio I*. Here, the solo violin accompanies the interventions of the saxophone, clarinet, harp, tuba and

bass clarinet. A leading role in the orchestral chromatics is played by the wood winds that accompany the discourse of the violin.

*Quasi Tempo I* (bars 173-213) is the repeat of the *Allegretto* section, followed by the *coda* (bars 214-257) in which a musical variation of the suburban Viennese folklore occurs (*Kärtner Volksweise come one pastorale*). The violin interprets, in a 3/8 bar, flageolets on the melodic segments in popular Viennese spirit, in modulations of *p* and *pp* of the bass clarinet with the accompaniment of trumpets, violins and cellos, with echo effects. The tempo precipitates, it becomes more animated, the first part ending in *Allegretto*, but with a *stretto (a tempo, ma quasi stretta)*, in dynamic contrasts, from *mf* to *ff* and *f* until the end in *mp* (*mf* on the violin).

**The second part** of the concerto is divided into two sections that are also played without interruption: *Allegro* (bars 1-135) and *Adagio* (bars 136-230). The *Allegro* of the second part, in triple meter (3/4), starts in *sff* and *fortissimo* on an ensemble chord. The second part has a three sections structure: *A - B - A*. The solo violin has writing on exceptional divisions, with values# of quavers, semiquavers, demisemiquavers, played in *recitative-rubato* style ("free as a cadence").

The image shows a page of a musical score. At the top, it reads "Allegro 3/4, s. s. ma sempre rubato, frei wie eine Kadenz". Below this, there are several staves of music. The top staff is for the violin, followed by woodwinds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon), and then strings. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mf*, *f*, and *ppp*. The music is written in a complex, expressive style characteristic of the composer.

The central section is between bars 1-43. The atonal writing in dodecapronic technique alternates between the solo violin and the winds with strings in *pizzicato*. The solo part is played between the violin, the saxophone and the clarinet.

The middle part - B (bars 44-95) is very free in terms of interpretation and tempo. A full solo violin cadence dominates here. On the violin, the composer introduces interpretation techniques such as *col legno*. The expression requires a finer rhythmic precision, the musical discourse evolving to a state of tranquillity.

*Tempo I* (bars 96-135) - *Allegro rubato* (A) – brings the repeat with structural elements from the first part, included with the fortissimo chord that started the second part:

The second section of Part II - *Adagio* (bars 136-230) is structured as follows: the Choral (bars 136-157), Variation I (bars 158-177), Variation II (bars 178-197), the Carinthian folklore song - *Molto tranquillo* (bars 198-213), Epilogue (the element in the coda of the first part) and the Coda (bars 214-230). The *Adagio* itself in composed binary meter (4/4) introduces

the Protestant choral played with an exemplary technique. In this section (bars 136-157), the composer combines the serial technique and the modal contrapuntal writing. A pedal on the sound A prepares the entry of the choral with the song played by the solo violin and the winds trio (2 clarinets and one bass clarinet), revealing the organ sound effect (the contra-fagot and the woodwind instruments are added to them).[3]

### 3. Final aspects

The melody of the choral is played on crotchets and minims, following the syllables of the religious text.

The theme of the choral is brought alternatively by the solo violin and the woodwind instruments. Variation I (bars 158-177) is anticipated by the alternation - woodwind – solo violin, in imitative style, with *echo effects*. In the first variation, the choral is brought initially in canon (the cellos and the harp) and then it is expressed by the trombone. In variation I, a counter-melody, on the solo violin, is attached to the melody of the choral (bar 164) with a *sourdine* which sometimes sounds like a "lamentation" [4, p.258]. This counter-melody will be taken over

alternatively by the orchestral tutti that is by the ensemble of the violins and violas, being led to a culminating point and solved by the *epilogue (Molto tranquillo)* where the Viennese version of the melody reappears.

*Variation II* (bars 178-197) brings the choral in reverse (on horns, tuba, trombones, cellos and harp), leading this culminating point to the epilogue, where the *Viennese song* is interpreted in *pp* modulation, creating the effect of distance. *The coda* (bars 214-230) brings again the melody of the *choral* superposed on the on serial theme. The *concerto* ends by a "mirror" with arpeggios of fifths from the introduction of the initial *Andante*, with a *ppp* modulation.

The tempo fluctuations and the alternative bars are very common in the second part, *Allegro - Adagio*, the *rubato*

and the discourse in the recitative style being assigned to the solo violin, which develops a wide range of rhythmic values.

#### References

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4. \*\*\**The Grove Lexicon of Music*. Oxford. University of Oxford, U.K., 1990, p. 258.