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Arnold Schoenberg's Pierrot lunaire:
A Study of Sprechstimme and Vocal Performance Practice
through Sound Recording

by

Aidan Leigh Soder

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Walter B. Bailey, Associate Professor, Chair
Musicology

Karim Al-Zand, Assistant Professor
Composition and Theory

Joyce Farwell, Professor Emerita
Voice

Kathleen Kaun, Professor
Voice

Maria-Regina Recht, Associate Professor
German and Slavic Studies

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For Joyce and Caitlin
ABSTRACT

Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*:
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Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire* has inspired discussion and debate among scholars and performers alike for over ninety years. In particular, his use of *Sprechstimme*, a unique combination of speaking and singing, has been examined from a variety of perspectives and continues to be a controversial subject. Though scholarly writings have attempted to address performance practice issues, there are substantial gaps in the literature regarding the specific, technical, vocal elements required to execute *Pierrot’s* *Sprechstimme*. Additionally, though a few recordings have been cursorily cited and reviewed, a more thorough and comprehensive examination of the *Pierrot* discography and the interpretation of *Sprechstimme* has been lacking.

Contemporary performance practice often evolves through a work’s sound recording legacy; *Pierrot lunaire* is no exception. *Sprechstimme* delivery varies greatly throughout the discography, and though a clear performance practice tradition has not emerged during the last sixty-five years (since Schoenberg’s first recording in 1940), similar characteristics can be found among the recordings. This dissertation provides a thorough discussion of *Pierrot’s* technical vocal requirements and how the sound
recordings can assist the interpreter in her realization of the Sprechstimme, thereby contributing to the establishment of a performance practice tradition.

Chapter One provides an overview of the origins of Sprechstimme, Schoenberg’s intentions for its delivery (as revealed through the score and various documents), and the vocal elements necessary for its execution. Chapter Two examines four important early interpreters of the work and the first recording. Chapter Three discusses the range of interpretational styles represented on the recordings. Chapter Four presents some of the interpretational problems encountered in several popular, benchmark recordings, and also provides an overview of the remaining recordings. Chapter Five addresses five specific recordings, provides a brief history of each singer, a stylistic overview of each singer’s interpretation and delivery of the Sprechstimme, and a detailed study of four individual songs. Finally, Chapter Six provides conclusions regarding the benefit of the sound recording, drawn to help the performer establish clear interpretational guidelines which could aid in the establishment of a solid performance practice tradition.
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Lastly, my love and fascination with Schoenberg and this work began seven years ago when I first performed *Pierrot lunaire* as a masters student. I was privileged to work with an excellent ensemble, but perhaps more importantly, we were coached by an exceptional musician and human being, Norman Fischer. My continued interest in *Pierrot* is due, in no small part, to the unbridled enthusiasm and zeal he expressed during that semester’s work.

Additional thanks are also due to my dear friend, Christopher Green, for his excellent translations of the Friedrich Cerha article and the conversation between Boulez and Adorno.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vi

List of Musical Examples ix

Chapter
1. Schoenberg’s Sprechstimme in Pierrot lunaire: Origins and Expectations 1
   Introduction 2
   Origins of Sprechstimme 9
   What did Schoenberg Want? 18
   Performing Sprechstimme 26
   Questions of Intention and Ideals

2. Pierrot Performances: Early Interpreters and the First Recording 32
   Albertine Zehme 37
   Erika Stiedry-Wagner 39
   Marie Gutheil-Schoder 41
   Marya Freund 43
   First Recording

3. Sprechstimme Performance Styles: an Overview 47

4. Discography Overview 61

5. Five Unique Pierrots 74
   Stylistic Overview 77
   The Songs 84
   “Rote Messe” 86
   “Die Kreuze” 89
   “Parodie” 93
   “O alter Duft” 98

6. Conclusion 100

Appendix
   A. Discography 110
   B. Order of Songs 116
   C. Translations 117
   D. Full Scores 119

Bibliography 136
# MUSICAL EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 1:</td>
<td>Engelbert Humperdinck, <em>Königskinder</em>, Act I</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 2:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Gurre-Lieder</em>, Part III (1912 study score)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 3:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Gurre-Lieder</em>, Part III (1913 piano/vocal score)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 4:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Pierrot lunaire</em>, “Mondstrunken,” mm. 23-25 (fair copy)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 5:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Pierrot lunaire</em>, “Mondstrunken,” mm. 23-25</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 6:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Pierrot lunaire</em>, “Nacht,” mm. 6-8 (fair copy)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 7:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Pierrot lunaire</em>, “Rote Messe,” mm. 24-25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 8:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Pierrot lunaire</em>, “Rote Messe,” mm. 11-12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 9:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Pierrot lunaire</em>, “Enthauptung,” m. 20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 10:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Pierrot lunaire</em>, “O alter Duft,” mm. 1-3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 11:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Pierrot lunaire</em>, “Raub,” mm. 6-7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 1:</td>
<td>Arnold Schoenberg, <em>Pierrot lunaire</em>, “Nacht,” m. 10</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All *Pierrot lunaire* examples are from the 1914 published score unless otherwise indicated.
CHAPTER ONE

Schoenberg’s *Sprechstimme* in *Pierrot lunaire*: Origins and Expectations

Arnold Schoenberg’s famous chamber work of 1912, *Pierrot lunaire*, opus 21, has generated more scholarly attention than perhaps any other work of the modern era. It has been programmed on countless concerts, commercially recorded over forty times, and has precipitated a deluge of historical, theoretical, and performance practice-related articles, lectures, and books. Schoenberg’s use of *Sprechstimme*, a unique combination of speaking and singing, has been one of the most frequently addressed topics, and has been approached from a variety of perspectives: how exactly to perform it; its genesis, evolution, and execution; its notation and how that translates to performance; and what Schoenberg intended by his apparently enigmatic Preface to the work.

While many of these issues have been addressed in some depth (and yet frequently without satisfaction or consensus), little has been written about the range of interpretations and scope of performance styles heard in the extant recordings and how they directly affect and influence subsequent interpretations. These recordings help us identify and define many of the components of *Sprechstimme*, as well as provide insight into the performance of some of its more ambiguous elements. The wide spectrum of performance and interpretational possibilities also draws attention to the appreciable absence of a performance practice tradition. *Pierrot lunaire*’s iconoclastic reputation alone practically defies the establishment of such a tradition, leaving the novice interpreter with few reliable resources to aid her in her interpretation. Through intense scrutiny of the recordings, close adherence to the score, and a thorough examination of
the available written resources, we can, perhaps, develop a better understanding of what 
*Sprechstimme* is and what Schoenberg desired from it. This better understanding can 
then lead to a more standardized interpretation—without negating the performer’s artistic 
autonomy—and the establishment of a reliable performance practice tradition.

Since the first commercial recording of *Pierrot lunaire* in 1940 (with Schoenberg 
conducting), the interpretation of the *Sprechstimme* has varied widely. No two Speakers 
or Reciters, titles Schoenberg applied to the vocalist, interpret the work exactly alike. 
Because of the challenges and ambiguities inherent in the notation and interpretation of 
*Sprechstimme*, *Pierrot lunaire* continues to be as puzzling today to scholars and 
performers alike as it was ninety years ago. Schoenberg’s writings, the score itself, as 
well as sixty-five years of recordings, aid us considerably in understanding and 
interpreting of one of the twentieth century’s greatest works.

**The Origins of *Sprechstimme***

*Sprechstimme* first appeared on the musical scene in 1897 in Engelbert 
Humperdinck’s melodrama *Königskinder*; a few years later, Max von Schilling employed 
it in his melodrama, *Das Hexenlied* (1902). Humperdinck used the term “bound 
melodrama” (*gebundenes Melodram*) to describe the style of *Sprechnoten* 
(Humperdinck’s term) in *Königskinder*: a passage of text declaimed in a precise rhythm 
to a musical background.¹ Humperdinck replaced traditional oval noteheads with “x”s, 
but still notated them on a full staff and with a clear melodic contour.

¹ Edward F. Kravitt, “The Joining of Words and Music in Late Romantic Melodrama,” *The Musical 
Quarterly* 62 (October 1976): 575.
Melodrama—a genre or technique in which text was declaimed against a musical background or was spoken between musical interludes—became a popular art form during the mid-eighteenth century. Early examples from this period include Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Pygmalion* (set to music by Coignet in 1770, and then again by Georg Benda in 1779), and Benda’s *Ariadne* (1775). Melodrama fell out of popularity during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, but experienced a resurgence in the late nineteenth century with Humperdinck’s *Königskinder*, Richard Strauss’ *Enoch Arden* (1897), and Max von Schillings’ *Das Hexenlied* (1902). *Königskinder* is of particular interest in that it was the first time speech-like declamation was given precise rhythms and intervals.  

Early performances of *Königskinder* in Europe created quite a stir. In spite of the immensely lyrical, highly Romantic, post-Wagnerian music, the public simply would not endorse the new manner in which the speech-music combination was being used. Critics complained that only a highly educated actor-musician could possibly execute the new technique. The composer ceded that this was, indeed, the case and eventually removed the *Sprechnoten*, replacing it with traditional notation, thus transforming the melodrama into an opera. In 1910 when *Königskinder*, the opera, made its way to America and the

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3 For a more detailed description of *fin-de-siècle* melodrama see Edward Kravitt’s aforementioned article in *The Musical Quarterly*. 
Metropolitan Opera, the *Sprechstimme* passages no longer existed—and *Königskinder* was extremely well-received.

Despite the fact that *Sprechstimme* had already been used, there is some disagreement as to whether Schoenberg had heard Humperdinck’s work or even knew of its existence. Most scholars insist that he must have heard it, or at least known about it.  

First, when *Königskinder* received its premiere in 1897 in Munich, the calamity that ensued found its voice in two very important music periodicals—the *Neue musikalische Rundschau* of Prague and the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* of Berlin. Edward Kravitt suggests that because Schoenberg was interested in musical controversy, he must have been aware of the “war of words” that was ensuing.  

Second, *Königskinder* was also performed in Vienna, where Schoenberg was living, only a few months after the Munich debacle. Third, during Schoenberg’s tenure with Ernst von Wolzogen’s famous Berlin *Überbrett* in the early 1900s, Schoenberg worked alongside Waldemar Wendland, a musician who was a former composition student of Humperdinck.  

Though Wendland worked as one of Wolzogen’s conductors, it is not difficult to imagine that Humperdinck’s relatively recent notational experiment in *Königskinder* could have been a topic of conversation between Wendland and Schoenberg.

The voice of opposition to this theory came from Schoenberg’s close friend and frequent collaborator, Edward Steuermann, who insisted that Schoenberg had never attended or even heard of Humperdinck’s opera. In an interview with Gunther Schuller,  

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4 Though there is no direct evidence that Schoenberg knew of Humperdinck’s work, most scholars—including Reinhold Brinkmann and Edward Kravitt—concur that it is highly unlikely Schoenberg was unaware of Humperdinck’s *Sprechnoten.*
5 Kravitt, 576.
Steuermann addressed the question as to the origin of *Sprechstimme* for Schoenberg. “It originated in Schoenberg’s mind. It was—if you will—an inspiration.”⁷ When asked if Schoenberg knew of Humperdinck’s and von Schilling’s works, Steuermann replied:

I don’t think he did. Since Schoenberg lived, so to speak, in a completely different world, it is very unlikely that he heard any Humperdinck except perhaps *Hänsel und Gretel* . . . The idea of the “melodrama,” as it was called, was certainly generally known . . . but the way Schoenberg used it was certainly quite new . . . The explanation Schoenberg gave in his preface to *Pierrot* unfortunately solves only part of this problem.⁸

Regardless of Schoenberg’s knowledge or familiarity with Humperdinck’s use of the technique, certainly the way in which he used *Sprechstimme* in *Pierrot lunaire* was different than any use of it before or after.

But *Pierrot lunaire* was not the first work in which Schoenberg tried this new device. *Sprechstimme* first appeared in Schoenberg’s massive cantata/oratorio hybrid, the *Gurre-Lieder*. Primarily composed in 1900-01, it was then shelved and not completed for almost ten years; its publication in early 1912 predates *Pierrot*’s premiere by little more than six months. Schoenberg’s notation of the *Sprecher* in the 1912 autograph study score of the *Gurre-Lieder*, as well as the 1920 published full score, is identical to Humperdinck’s notation in *Königskinder*—“x” used in place of noteheads. A differently notated *Sprechstimme*—open, diamond-shaped noteheads (not unlike the notation of harmonics)—was used for brief, isolated portions of writing for the *Bauer* and *Männerchor*. In Alban Berg’s 1913 piano reduction, however, the *Sprecher*’s notation

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⁸ Ibid.
was changed so that all of the *Sprechstimme* was notated as open diamond-shaped noteheads.

**Figure 1.2:** Schoenberg, *Gurre-Lieder*, Part III. 1912 autograph study score.

![Sprechstimme notation](image)

**Figure 1.3:** Schoenberg, *Gurre-Lieder*, Part III. 1913 Piano/Vocal Score, transcribed by Alban Berg.

![Sprechstimme notation](image)

Schoenberg’s use of *Sprechstimme* in the *Gurre-Lieder* is neither as specific nor as pervasive as in *Pierrot lunaire* (and later works), but it certainly sets the stage for the new declamatory voice that would boldly emerge in 1912.

It must be acknowledged how very little is definitively known about the genesis of Schoenberg’s *Sprechstimme* and the process he went through to arrive at the final published version. Scholars have offered two possibilities as to the inspiration for Schoenberg’s “new” vocal technique: the previously mentioned late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century melodrama, and the *fin-de-siècle* French and German cabarets.9

Unfortunately, in none of the diaries, letters, and scores that exist from this time period did Schoenberg talk about the genesis and evolution of *Sprechstimme* from the *Gurre-Lieder* to *Pierrot lunaire*, nor did he discuss it when he incorporated *Sprechstimme* (albeit

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in a differently notated version) in later works such as *Ode to Napoleon* and *A Survivor from Warsaw*. And so we are left to surmise. We do know that the notation of the *Sprechstimme* as it exists in its published form did not exist in the early *Pierrot* manuscripts. The first complete manuscript and the subsequent fair copy contain *Sprechstimme* notation that is identical to that of the *Sprecher* in the *Gurre-Lieder* full score, as well as Humperdinck’s *Königskinder*—“x”s as noteheads instead of on the stems. The placement of the *Sprechstimme* line in the layout of the score in these two early manuscripts also differs from the printed version; the recitation line is notated at the top, above the instrumental ensemble. By the first edition of the printed score, the notation had changed, as had the placement of the recitation line: “x”s were now on the stem instead of the notehead, and the recitation line was moved to immediately above the piano but under the other instrumental parts.  

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10 Reinhold Brinkmann, “What the Sources Tell Us . . . A Chapter of *Pierrot* Philology,” *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 10 (June 1987): 24. Brinkmann presents a thorough examination of Schoenberg’s compositional process, identifying and explaining the numerous *Pierrot* sources. The first complete autograph score is held at the Library of Congress, and the fair copy is housed at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City.
One can only speculate as to the reason for the change in notation and placement of the vocal line. In regard to notation, the change to traditional notation with the placement of the “x” on the stem allowed for greater specificity and clarity in rhythmic duration. It was difficult to notate half notes and whole notes with the “x” as the notehead. In the early manuscripts, Schoenberg notated these longer rhythms in one of three ways: placing two “x”s side by side to represent the half note; or less frequently, using the traditional half or whole note, but with an “x” drawn through the notehead, or using the diamond-shaped note to represent the half or whole note. This method of notation makes it significantly more difficult to visually discern the different rhythms. Therefore it would appear to be for practical purposes, in part, that the notation was changed. Additionally, though Schoenberg never spoke specifically about his desires regarding the Reciter’s adherence to pitch, the more specific notation certainly tends to emphasize some sort of pitch hierarchy.

Figure 1.6: Schoenberg Pierrot lunaire, "Nacht," m. 6–8. Used by permission, The Robert Owen Lehman Collection, on deposit at The Pierpont Morgan Library.

As to the change in placement of the vocal line in the layout of the score, one could assume that it was due to Schoenberg’s desire for the vocalist to be integrated into the ensemble. The original score placement resembled that of any other traditional solo or chamber vocal work in which the voice was the primary instrument accompanied by piano or chamber ensemble. Schoenberg believed that the instrumental ensemble was not
subsidiary to the voice but that the voice and the ensemble were on equal footing, each
taking turns in the presentation of important musical material. Even in performance,
Schoenberg preferred for the vocalist to be closer to the ensemble as opposed to
completely set apart from them. That being his goal, it seems a rather strategic change
to place the vocal line within the ensemble in the layout of the score.

What Did Schoenberg Want?

So why has Sprechstimme been a hotbed of controversy since Pierrot’s premiere
over ninety years ago? Before that issue can be addressed, we must first examine what
we know about Sprechstimme based on Schoenberg’s own writings as found in the
Preface to Pierrot lunaire, in his letters, essays, and interviews, and in his 1940
recording.

Though scholars and performers have spent decades debating what Schoenberg
truly intended and actually wanted, his general concerns and desires are well-presented
in the Preface and should not be easily dismissed:

The melody given in the Sprechstimme by means of notes is
not intended for singing (except for specially marked isolated
exceptions). The task of the performer is to transform it into a
speech-melody, taking into account the given pitch. This is
achieved by:

11 Josef Rufer, The Works of Arnold Schoenberg: A Catalogue of his Compositions, Writings, and
Paintings, trans. Dika Newlin (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 40; Joan Allen Smith,
letter to Hans Rosbaud (quoted in Rufer), he acknowledged that balance had been an issue in the recording
and that the ideal presentation was to have the Speaker somewhat separated from the ensemble, making the
vocal line distinct as well as giving the instruments their due credit. In Smith’s article, in which she
interviewed Erika Stiedry-Wagner (the Reciter on Schoenberg’s 1940 recording) and Rudolf Kolisch
(Austrian violinist—and Schoenberg’s brother-in-law—who participated in numerous Schoenberg
premieres), Kolisch and Stiedry-Wagner both acknowledged that she stood in the midst of the ensemble.
Kolisch commented that Schoenberg believed “the speaking voice was equivalent to any other instrument,”
and that it “ought to be one of the voices and not a solo with accompaniment” (277-78).
I. Maintaining the rhythm as accurately as if one were singing, i.e. with no more freedom than would be allowed with a singing melody;

II. Becoming acutely aware of the difference between singing tone and speaking tone: singing tone unalterably stays on pitch, whereas speaking tone gives the pitch but immediately leaves it again by falling and rising. However, the performer must be very careful not to adopt a singsong speech pattern. That is not intended at all. Nor should one strive for realistic, natural speech. On the contrary, the difference between ordinary speaking and speaking that contributes to a musical form should become quite obvious. But it must never be reminiscent of singing.

Moreover, I stress the following concerning performances:

It is never the task of performers to recreate the mood and character of the individual pieces on the basis of the meaning of the words, but rather solely on the basis of the music. The extent to which the tone-painting-like rendering of the events and emotions of the text was important to the author is already found in the music. Where the performer finds it lacking, he should abstain from presenting something that was not intended by the author. He would not be adding, but rather detracting. \(^{12}\)

Within the first sentence Schoenberg unequivocally states that the notes in the vocal line are not to be sung. Yet if it is not to be sung, why are there specifically notated pitches, and how can the performer avoid singing them? Obviously Schoenberg anticipated a certain amount of confusion in regard to his Preface (although he probably would never have imagined that we would still be discussing this ninety years after the fact) and explained further. To paraphrase, the goal of the Reciter is to create a melodic speech which acknowledges the pitches ("taking into account"), but does not steadfastly adhere to them. This can be accomplished primarily two ways. First, the Reciter is to

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adhere to the rhythm as written without taking any more liberties than one might assume in any piece of sung music. Second—and perhaps this is the grey area which leads performers down an uncertain and murky path—one must know one’s own voice well enough to be able to clearly distinguish between speech and song and then find the correct balance between the two. Schoenberg must have understood that here lies the crux of the matter. Up until this point, singers had lived in the world of shimmering vibrato, legato line, and the omnipotence of fixed pitch. In Schoenberg’s newly-created paradigm, the performer must be willing to divorce herself from the exact duration of the notated pitch; that is, if a certain Sprechstimme pitch is written as a dotted quarter note, she must acknowledge that the majority of that duration is spent falling—or less frequently, rising—toward the next pitch. It is, perhaps, no wonder that many of the early interpreters of Pierrot were actresses—women who were more accustomed to using a wider range and inflectional palette of speech than singers, and could better understand the flexibility of tone required for the work.

The charge put to the performer is, in fact, to find a way to declaim the text so that one develops neither a “sing-song” tone nor a natural (albeit heightened) form of speech. This is no small task. The vocal range of regular, present-day speech encompasses only a major second to a minor third; the recitation of lyrical poetry spans a fourth; comedy approximately a fifth to a sixth; and classical verse performances (Shakespeare) all the way up to a seventh. Recordings of early twentieth century poetic recitations actually have reciters whose spoken range during performance reaches an octave and a half.\footnote{Friedrich Cerha, “Zur Interpretation der Sprechstimme in Schönbergs Pierrot lunaire,”\textit{ Musik-Konzepte} 112/113 (July 2001): 66.} Schoenberg’s score encompasses two and a half octaves, a range which once prompted
Pierre Boulez (a frequent conductor of the work) to remark that the range is both too high and too low.\textsuperscript{14} Schoenberg continues in the Preface that there should be an appreciable difference between ordinary speaking and that which contributes to a larger musical form. But again, it should never resemble singing. A clear line of demarcation between singing and \textit{Sprechstimme} becomes even more important because of the handful of instances in the score where Schoenberg \textit{does} instruct the Reciter to \textit{sing}. These instances are clearly notated in the score so that there can be no confusion as to what is to be sung (no “x” plus the written instructions “gesungen”) and what is to be performed as \textit{Sprechstimme} (“x” on the stem, as well as the word “gesprochen” when following a sung passage).

\textbf{Figure 1.7: Schoenberg, \textit{Pierrot lunaire}, "Rote Messe," mm. 24-25.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.7.png}
\caption{Schoenberg, \textit{Pierrot lunaire}, "Rote Messe," mm. 24-25.}
\end{figure}

It is Schoenberg’s final instruction in the Preface that is, perhaps, the most enigmatic: do not add that which is not already present in the score. This sounds simple enough but it is unclear what the intended parameters were and what kinds of additions would be considered inappropriate. It is, perhaps, an exaggeration when he stresses that it is not the task of the performer to recreate the mood or the character based on the text alone, but rather solely on the music; it is the marriage of the text and the music that makes this work effective. If the music alone were able to communicate everything

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
necessary and even everything Schoenberg intended, there would be no need for the text. One can only assume that he does not mean to imply that the performance should be rigid and without expression, but that the more theatrical devices should be avoided. Many performers have added various vocal characterizations which were not instructed by the composer (e.g. sounding "sickly" in no. 7, "Der kranke Mond"\textsuperscript{15}), as well as exaggerated articulations and dynamics, and instances of overt tone painting not indicated in the score. Schoenberg's instructions could be understood as this: where the performer feels that they are aiding the listener in the interpretation and understanding of the piece—that they are adding more emotion and clarity to the piece—the composer insists that this does just the opposite. All of the emotions and intentions of the character already exist in the music.

By extension, Schoenberg was adamant that the Reciter should not dress in costume for \textit{Pierrot lunaire}, including traditional Pierrot garb: white and black flowing pants, tunic, ruffled collar, and painted white face. He believed this only trivialized the event and again, detracted instead of added to the music.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{16} Albertine Zehme, the first Reciter, most likely dressed as Pierrot for the October 16\textsuperscript{th} Berlin premiere. There is some dispute as to whether she dressed as Pierrot or Columbine, Pierrot’s love interest. Most authors—Steuermann, Boulez, the interview between Stiedry-Wagner and Joan Smith, as well as a 1912 New York Review—agree that she was dressed as Pierrot, much to Schoenberg’s chagrin. There is one source, \textit{Arnold Schoenberg} by H. H. Stuckenschmidt (London: Calder, 1959) 60, which says that Zehme dressed as Columbine. This is most certainly erroneous, and has unfortunately been cited by several other authors (Jonathan Dunsby, John Crawford, Sharon Mabry). Given Zehme’s flair for the dramatic, her performances of Otto Vrieslander’s \textit{Pierrot lunaire} melodrama in 1911 in which she dressed as Pierrot, as well as the corroboration of the aforementioned reliable authors, it is likely that she was dressed as Pierrot. Steuermann and Stiedry-Wagner both say that Schoenberg disapproved of her costuming; as Columbine’s traditional dress (a dress, perhaps an apron, and a hat) would hardly be that different from a woman’s everyday attire, it is unlikely that Schoenberg would have protested to something that insignificant. Schoenberg’s opposition might also be due to the fact that he organized a cycle of songs in which the narrator frequently changes, therefore it is likely that he wouldn’t want the Reciter to dress as a character that is clearly not always the narrator (see Reinhold Brinkmann’s article “The Fool as Paradigm: Schönberg’s \textit{Pierrot lunaire} and the Modern Artist” published in Konrad Boehmer’s book, \textit{Schoenberg and...}
Though the Preface is frequently viewed as ambiguous and incomplete, there are several other sources that emphasize what Schoenberg may have intended (or did not intend) for the Reciter in *Pierrot lunaire*. As was previously mentioned, many of the early interpreters of *Pierrot* were actresses, including Albertine Zehme, the woman who commissioned and premiered the work. Schoenberg could have employed a singer for subsequent performances but did not. In fact, the Reciter most approved and sanctioned by Schoenberg was another actress, Erika Stiedry-Wagner. While it is true that many of these actresses had some musical training (as was not uncommon at the time), they were first and foremost actresses, many of whom would emphasize that fact, including Stiedry-Wagner. In the early 1920s, several years after the premiere, the singers Marie Gutheil-Schoder and Marya Freund were brought to Schoenberg to “audition” for a European tour of *Pierrot*, but after several rehearsals, it became evident that neither would be able to do it; Gutheil-Schoder because of insufficient rehearsal time, and Freund because her

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*Kandinsky: An Historic Encounter* (Amsterdam, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 158). Also, as Zehme was paying the fee of 1500 Marks for the commission (see the contract between Schoenberg and Zehme as shown in Arnold Schoenberg’s *Sämtliche Werke*, “*Pierrot lunaire*” Kritischer Bericht, ed. Reinhold Brinkmann, section 6, series B, vol. 24, part 1 (Mainz: Schott; Vienna: Universal Edition, 1995), 227), it is not unlikely that she determined that the premiere would run according to her liking. Frau Zehme performed in front of a screen while Schoenberg and the instrumentalists were concealed behind it. This was an arrangement that Schoenberg did not endorse and never used again. In fact, in later correspondence Schoenberg expressed that the voice should be part of the fabric of the ensemble, not set apart, and not more important than the instruments. If anything, he considered the voice subsidiary to the instruments (see letter to Hans Rosbaud in Josef Rufer’s book *The Works of Arnold Schoenberg: A Catalogue of His Compositions, Writings, and Paintings*, trans. Dika Newlin (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 40). The stage arrangements at the premiere have led several authors to presumptuously and erroneously assume that Schoenberg approved of the theatrical presentation (see John Crawford, “The Relationship of Text and Music in the Vocal Works of Arnold Schoenberg, 1908-1924” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1983), 232; and Sharon Mabry, “Vocal Problems in the Performance of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*, op. 21” (D.M.A. diss., George Peabody College for Teachers, 1977), 169-71). These added effects were not intended by the author and would therefore detract from his intentions and concept of the work.

interpretation was not at all what Schoenberg had envisioned. Schoenberg wrote in a letter to Frau Freund:

There are a number of things regarding the performance of my works which I would like to talk over with you. I am anxious to explain to you why I cannot allow any will but mine to prevail in realizing the musical thoughts which I have recorded on paper, and why realizing them must be done in such deadly earnest, with such inexorable severity, because the composing was done in just that way.\footnote{Stuckenschmidt, 283.}

She was then replaced by Stiedry-Wagner. Frau Wagner not only toured the Continent with Schoenberg, performing *Pierrot* in Prague, Amsterdam, Italy, Greece, France, and Spain, but she was also Schoenberg’s Reciter of choice for the first *Pierrot* recording.

Though the musical complexity of the score did prove to be exceptionally difficult for these early interpreters, it is clear by Schoenberg’s choice of performers that he preferred a rendering that was more influenced by heightened speech than singing. In 1922, two versions of *Pierrot* were performed in the home of Alma Mahler-Werfel, the first with Erika Stiedry-Wagner reciting and Schoenberg conducting, and the second with the French-Polish singer Marya Freund and Darius Milhaud conducting. Not only was the second performance sung, but it was sung in French (not Giraud’s original poetry, but a re-worked translation by Freund).\footnote{Darius Milhaud, “Of Arnold Schoenberg on His Seventieth Birthday: Personal Recollections,” *The Musical Quarterly* 30 (1944): 382, quoted in Lorraine Gorrell, “Performing the Sprechstimme in Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*, op. 21,” *Journal of Singing* 55, no. 2 (November/December 1998): 10.} Upon hearing the second version, Alma Mahler reported in her diary that “Schoenberg scarcely recognized his work—but the majority of those present were for Milhaud’s interpretation. Doubtless, it was more original in Schoenberg’s more rhythmical style of accented speaking than in the song, where one noticed rather the similarity with Debussy. The authentic interpretation was naturally the
one by Schoenberg-Stein. For *Pierrot* to suddenly sound like Debussy, great liberties must have been taken with the vocal line; the ethereal and macabre atmosphere inherent in Schoenberg’s music must have been destroyed.

Stiedry-Wagner expressed that one must be a *Sprecher*—one must know how to speak, not how to sing—and that Schoenberg frequently told her how wrong it was to sing it. In a frequently cited letter to the Hungarian composer Alexander Jemnitz dated April 15, 1931, Schoenberg wrote:

> Pierrot lunaire is *not to be sung*! Song melodies must be balanced and shaped in quite a different way from spoken melodies [*Sprechmelodien*]. You would entirely distort the work if you had it sung, and everyone who said “That’s no way of writing for singing!” would be right. I must tell you that I was for a long time angry with Frau Freund for making the same mistake, and I am convinced that this hint will suffice to keep you from any such infringement . . .

In August of 1940, after Schoenberg had immigrated to America, he wrote a letter to Frau Wagner and her husband, the conductor Fritz Stiedry, shortly before they were to record *Pierrot*, “We must thoroughly freshen up the speaking part, too . . . I intend to catch perfectly that light, ironical, satirical tone in which the piece was actually conceived. Then, too, times and ideas have changed a lot . . .” And in a letter from 1949, Schoenberg wrote to a composer who was planning on engaging Marya Freund as the Reciter, “I should merely like to emphasize that none of these poems is meant to be sung,

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20 Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Mein Leben* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), 151, as quoted in Smith, 88. Mahler-Werfel’s accounting of the day is slightly different than Milhaud’s (and also as mentioned in Stuckenschmidt, 279)—she reports that it was Schoenberg’s pupil, Erwin Stein, who conducted the Stiedry-Wagner performance, not Schoenberg.

21 Smith, 100.


23 Rufer, 40.
but must be spoken without fixed pitch."²⁴ And in that same year, a letter to the conductor Hans Rosbaud (who recorded *Pierrot* in 1957 with Jeanne Héricard²⁵) in reference to Schoenberg’s own recording, “In some respects—tempo, presentation of mood, and above all the playing of the instrumentalists—they are really good, even very good. They are not so good with respect to the balance of instruments and recitation . . . who [the recitation], after all, never *sings* [my italics] the theme, but, at most, speaks against it . . .”²⁶

Finally, inasmuch as primary sources are concerned, there is the first recording of *Pierrot* from 1940. In the previously cited letter that Schoenberg wrote to Frau Wagner and her husband, Schoenberg went on to say that he was aware that two weeks of rehearsal was not a sufficient amount of time to prepare a work that would be “worthy of being immortalized on records as the authentic performance.”²⁷ Based on this letter, it is safe to assume that the final product on Schoenberg’s recording is perhaps not how he heard it in his ear; nevertheless, he was, in general, pleased with Frau Wagner’s interpretation and continued to use her in future performances. Just as there are recordings in which the vocal line is almost entirely sung,²⁸ in Schoenberg’s recording, Frau Wagner seems to go out of her way to not perform any of the prescribed pitches (with the exception of the pitches that are marked *gesungen*, which she executes with relative accuracy). Not only are most of the *Sprachstimme* pitches completely ignored, but she frequently shapes the line differently, going against the direction of Schoenberg’s

²⁴ Ibid.
²⁵ Interestingly enough, this recording is one of the more *spoken* recordings in the entire discography.
²⁶ Rufer, 40.
²⁷ Ibid.
²⁸ See the recordings of Ilona Steingruber-Wildgans (1961), Yvonne Minton (1977), and Leslie Boucher (1993), to name but a few.
notated melody. Though Stiedry-Wagner’s recording seems anything but accurate, it is, nevertheless, quite effective. What she lacks in pitch—or even intervallic—accuracy, she more than makes up for with intent, expression (aligned with what Schoenberg has put in the score), and the other-worldly created ambience.

Beyond studying Schoenberg’s writings pertaining to the performance of Sprechstimme, as well as the recording he conducted, there is simply no substitute for spending time in the score itself. There is a fountain of information on the notated page that should—in conjunction with Schoenberg’s written statements—provide the essential tools necessary for an effective and accurate rendering of the vocal line.

**Performing Sprechstimme**

In order to master a vocal technique which seems to have endless performance possibilities, the performer must establish a rubric of how she intends to render the Sprechstimme—which vocal qualities transform the line into Sprechstimme, and just as importantly, which vocal qualities do not. The first place to look for guidance is, again, Schoenberg’s Preface to the score. From there we know the vocal line is not to be sung; pitch is to be taken into account; rhythm is to be maintained; pitch should be attained and then immediately left by rising or falling away from it. As far as describing the technical means required to perform the Sprechstimme, however, the Preface is lacking. One technical issue the Preface does not address but which is crucial in distinguishing Sprechstimme passages from non-Sprechstimme passages is vibrato. The impression, or perception, of singing results from the presence of vibrato;\(^{29}\) ergo, the absence or

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minimizing of vibrato will lend itself more favorably to producing *Sprechstimme.* This is especially important in the perception and reception of the sung versus the not-sung pitches. If every pitch has substantial vibrato, then it is almost impossible to distinguish the few sung pitches from the rest of the score which is not to be sung. The absence of vibrato, however, does not exclusively mean that the sound produced will be *Sprechstimme.* In Vladimir Golschmann’s recording of *Pierrot,* the Reciter, Ilona Steingruber-Wildgans, sings almost the entire score—with almost no vibrato, but also without the required speech-like qualities. Steingruber-Wildgans sings practically every note in that she fails to leave the pitch immediately after reaching it, as instructed in Schoenberg’s Preface. Conversely, rising and falling from the pitch also does not exclusively render the declamation as *Sprechstimme.* In Mary Thomas’ 1973 recording (with David Atherton, conductor), the vocal line is delivered with much rising and falling, but also with an excessive amount of vibrato. The motion that exists between the pitches is exaggerated, and again, it becomes difficult to discern which pitches are to be sung and which are not. It is the combination of a minimized vibrato (one that is practically imperceptible) and the immediate abandonment of the original pitch that produces a more speech-like quality of declamation.

Whether one actually performs each of the notated pitches, maintains intervallic integrity but not pitch accuracy, only follows the contour of the line, or even if one does

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30 Vibrato may be defined as “the *audible* [my italics], regular pulsation, oscillation, or fluctuation of a single pitch that varies no more than a semitone . . .” (Clifton Ware, *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 180.) Dr. Ware continues: “Such a variation in pitch is normally perceived by the ear as a quality characteristic of the tone rather than a pitch deviation.” The frequency of a normal, classical vibrato is 5–7 cycles per second and involves a fluctuation in pitch. As vibrato is lessened, the number of cycles (or oscillations) per second is reduced, and the fluctuation in pitch is also narrowed. Therefore what is perceived as a “straight tone” is a tone that still has oscillation, but perhaps to an inaudible or imperceptible extent. Vibrato, as used in this paper, is referring to the *audible* fluctuation in pitch which is a desirable quality in most classical singing.
none of the above (speak-sings it without regard to pitch, interval, or contour), it seems clear that the declamation should be done with as little vibrato as possible, as well as an immediate abandonment of the originally acquired pitch. These two characteristics—the presence/absence of vibrato coupled with the rising/falling from the pitch—are critical elements for performing *Sprechstimme*.

In the Preface, Schoenberg tells the performer that there is to be a rising and falling away from the pitch; he does not, however, address exactly how that is to be done, or if it is to be done on every pitch. In general, there are two primary means of leaving pitch as represented on the recordings: *portamento* and sliding. Both should be done subtly and tastefully so that the focus remains on the text and not the technique. A vocal *portamento* is the legato movement between two pitches in which discrete, intermediary pitches are discernable (as is prevalent in much late nineteenth-century vocal literature), and may be chromatic or diatonic. Sliding, in contrast, is the continuous, legato movement between two pitches where individual pitches are not discernable at any given point. This distinction is important as it is the opinion of this author that the majority of the *Sprechstimme* in *Pierrot* should be rendered with subtle sliding between the notes, particularly notes of long duration. When rendered tastefully, sliding is likely the technique that Schoenberg intended. This can be inferred from the score itself since Schoenberg specifically asks the Reciter to insert *portamenti* (or according to the score, *glissandi*[^31]) for specific text-painting purposes.

[^31]: Schoenberg referred to this exaggerated, pronounced motion between two pitches as a *glissando*. This brings up a critical disagreement that exists in verbiage. At least two other sources frequently refer to the general execution of *Sprechstimme* in terms of *glissando* (Sharon Mabry’s dissertation, 1977; Erwin Stein’s *Orpheus in New Guises*, 87); as this is primarily a pianistic term, it holds very little association for vocalists and is therefore an inappropriately-used term. Where Schoenberg notates a *glissando* in the vocal part, the vocalist will likely perform it as a *portamento*.
Also, since a portamento presents discrete pitches (with the smallest interval being the semi-tone), it would be almost impossible to perform a portamento between two pitches which are a short distance apart intervally but of a relatively long duration.
In sliding, however, microtones—intervals smaller than the semitone—are present.

Sliding allows the performer to easily move between notes that outline a small intervallic distance but are of a long rhythmic duration. This can also be done more subtly and with a great deal more nuance than the generally more obtrusive portamento, which by its very nature is more dramatic.\footnote{The primary vocal difference between a portamento and a slide is the perceptible presence or absence of vibrato, respectively, as well as the length of time spent on the initial pitch. A slide is a portamento with minimal to no vibrato. A slide reinforces no particular discrete pitch or tonal center because audible vibration is practically eliminated; we are no longer able to perceive the natural oscillations that occur during vibrato, therefore no specific pitch center is emphasized. Sliding also abandons the initial pitch immediately, likely in the direction of the next pitch. In the case of Pierrot, however, the performer will slide away from a pitch regardless of whether or not another pitch follows. The slide, therefore, is not dependent upon, nor in search of, the next pitch as a discrete goal. Vibrato, however, emphasizes a center of pitch—regardless of the width of the vibrato, there is a central pitch around which the vibration occurs (thus why vocalists refer to something as vibrating under, above, or in the center of the pitch). Because discrete pitches are heard in a vocal portamento, it is natural to assume that some kind of pitch centricity or hierarchy is present; therefore, vibrato must be present. Portamento is also characterized by when it occurs. Portamento does not occur until after a pitch has been sounded and clearly established. It then has a specific trajectory toward the next pitch. A portamento will not occur at the end of a phrase or line; a portamento will always have another note as its goal. Portamento in Pierrot, when overused, tends to make the piece sound parodistic of late nineteenth-century opera—certainly an undesirable effect in this atonal piece. The pervasive, more intrusive portamento, if not specifically notated in the score by the composer but added by the Reciter to provide heightened drama, would have surely chagrinned Schoenberg as it is an extra-musical addition that detracts from the intended effect.}{32}

Erwin Stein cautions performers about this very issue and frequently talks of gliding between notes: a portamento should not be used to link the intervals except for the few places where Schoenberg notates such a movement.\footnote{Erwin Stein, Orpheus in New Guises (Westport: Hyperion Press Inc., 1979), 87.}{33}

In contrast with the more difficult-to-render pitches of a long duration, shorter rhythms (which are more closely related to speech) do not require the same intentional rising or falling from the pitch, neither do they require the same careful attention to vibrato that longer-held notes do. The movement between notes of a shorter duration will automatically sound more like highly inflected speech. These sections take on a more melodrama-like character, sounding like heightened declamation and even less like singing.
Figure 1.11: Schoenberg, *Pierrot lunaire*, "Raub," mm. 6-7.

Tempo also must be given careful consideration when working through the *Sprechstimme*. Not only are metronome markings pervasive throughout Schoenberg's score (at the start of each song and within songs when there are considerable changes), but Schoenberg also indicates expressive markings alongside the tempi to aid the performers even further: no. 2 "Columbine" is marked *Fließende* with the \( \frac{\mu}{4} = 42-48 \); at m. 33, it is marked *viel langsamer* with the \( \frac{\mu}{4} = 100 \).\(^{34}\) Schoenberg gives copious tempo and expressive suggestions to all the performers throughout the score. These can only improve one's interpretation and successful rendering of the *Sprechstimme*. More difficulty will be experienced with the *Sprechstimme* if the given tempi are ignored and the Reciter and Conductor decide on a much slower tempo. For example, in one of René Leibowitz's recordings\(^ {35} \) made in 1954 with soprano Ethel Semser, several of the tempi are well below what Schoenberg notated in his score, and the effect is clear: it does not work. What flows in Schoenberg's recording (and other recordings which adhere more closely to Schoenberg's tempi) becomes lugubrious and interminable—and really, unexecutable—in Leibowitz's. In Leibowitz's recording, song no. 1, "Mondesrunken," is recorded at the \( \frac{\mu}{4} = 50 \); this is well below the published *Bewegt*, \( \frac{\mu}{4} = 66-76 \). An even

\[^{34}\]In Schoenberg's personal conducting score, he crossed out *viel*—"much"—and replaced it with *etwas*—"somewhat"—a more accurate description according to that metronome marking.

\[^{35}\]Leibowitz was an occasional collaborator with Schoenberg.
more drastic change is no. 16, "Gemeinheit," where Schoenberg indicates that it should be performed Ziemlich rasch ("immediately fast") with the \( \frac{\text{\textdollar}}{\text{\textdollar}} \) = ca.126; Leibowitz’s comes in at a pedantic \( \frac{\text{\textdollar}}{\text{\textdollar}} \) = 76! Tempi which are light and flowing with Schoenberg’s markings become heavy and lethargic in Leibowitz’s recording; those which should be fast and driving, become dirge-like and oppressive. English composer Alexander Goehr said that "generally, if the tempo is right the detail will come out right. Most wrong performances come about because the tempo is wrong."\textsuperscript{36}

Shouldn’t a performer have artistic license in regard to tempo? But should not a composer’s wishes carry just as much, if not more weight when determining tempo and other defining musical issues? In a work like *Pierrot lunaire*, where the tempo affects not only the overall shape of the piece but also the ability to successfully execute the *Sprechstimme*, shouldn’t Schoenberg’s meticulously marked score be given priority?

Schoenberg briefly addressed the issue of composer authority in his 1926 essay “About Metronome Markings.” The essay begins:

Conductors hold forth about metronome markings as if, whether successful or misguided, these offended their most sacred right—the right to make of the work what they succeed in getting out of it, and no more . . .

Interpreter’s rights; are there not also author’s rights? Does not the author, too, have a claim to make clear his opinion about the realization of his work, even though no conductor of genius will neglect to override the author’s opinion when the performance comes? Has not the author at least the right to indicate, in the copies of the work he himself publishes, how he imagines his ideas should be realized?\textsuperscript{37}

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Schoenberg continued that it is, perhaps, the composer who best knows how his own piece should go and that those who feel the need to drastically alter the tempo do so because they are not capable of being musically successful with the author’s indications.\footnote{Schoenberg further elucidates, referring to the Adagio of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony:
\ldots\ Beethoven writes M.M. $j = 60$. That's awkward. But fortunately people have already discovered that all Beethoven’s metronome-markings are wrong. So nobody plays it at 60 quarter-notes a minute, but, at the most, at 30. Obviously Beethoven’s marking is correct, though. And only bunglers with no inkling of what is involved \ldots\ are forced to take a slower tempo; and even so they are unable, when the tempo later quickens, to avoid an allegretto character. (Ibid., 343)
Schoenberg is simply expressing a sentiment that was not unlike those of other well-known composers of his day (Ravel, Stravinsky, Britten) who believed that if you were not going to play their piece as they composed it, then it ought not be played at all.}

Where are the boundary lines between speech and song? When is it no longer \textit{Sprechstimme} but rather ordinary singing or simply highly inflected speech? Perhaps Schoenberg’s recording with Erika Stiedry-Wagner errs on the side of melodrama-like, highly stylized speech; but Boulez’s recording from 1977 with Yvonne Minton—as well as Staffan Larson’s recording from 1993 with Ing-Britt Ibba Anderssen—is nothing short of a sung Lieder cycle with chamber ensemble (these more sung renditions, in fact, make \textit{Pierrot} sound like the next evolutionary step after Schoenberg’s 1909 \textit{Das Buch der hängenden Gärten}). Surely in the relatively large \textit{Pierrot lumaire} discography and the numerous performances that continue to be presented every year there must be a happy medium that can be reached: a true synthesis between speech and song where one cannot say “oh, that’s clearly speaking” or “that’s most definitely just singing,” but rather the only label possibly available is that which Schoenberg intended, \textit{Sprechstimme}. 
Questions of Intention and Ideals

There are primarily two issues of ambiguity in regard to the *Sprechstimme*. First, despite the substantial evidence indicating what Schoenberg wanted of and intended from the *Sprechstimme*, it is virtually impossible to know his every desire and intention and be able to realize them. Second, in spite of all that can be explained, there is still ambiguity as to how to execute the *Sprechstimme* vocally.

As stated previously, if we are to go by Schoenberg’s recording, letters, essays, conversations, and performances, he clearly endorsed a *Sprechstimme* that erred on the side of speech. When giving instruction to various interpreters, his single instruction was always the same: it must never be sung! He never said, “Careful that you don’t speak it too much,” or “Above all else, take care and observe all the pitches.” Schoenberg rarely even addressed the Reciter’s pitches, even the ones that are actually to be sung.

But if he did not want to hear all of the precise pitches then why notate them so specifically and on a full staff just as though it were a melody to be sung? And what are we to make of the instances in the score where the voice is in direct correlation to the instruments? First, it is important to remember that this was Schoenberg’s first attempt at *Sprechstimme* on such a grand scale. The *Sprechstimme* of the *Gurre-Lieder* was not intended to be more than dramatic speech, and if we are to believe Edward Steuermann, *Sprechstimme* was Schoenberg’s innovation; if we believe that Schoenberg was aware of Humperdinck’s and von Schilling’s works, then we must at least concede that Schoenberg’s pervasive use of *Sprechstimme* was entirely new, and that the gamut of its performance possibilities was largely untapped.
There are those *Sprechstimme* skeptics who believe that *Pierrot* should be more sung than spoken, citing as their support that had he not wanted it sung, he would not have written all those pitches.\(^{39}\) This is an essentially erroneous conclusion drawn by those who are not able to allow for a technique and notation that was still in its evolutionary stages. The fact that Schoenberg later changed his notation (as previously mentioned, in *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte*, op. 41, 1942, and *A Survivor from Warsaw*, op. 46, 1947) shows that not only was Schoenberg probably not satisfied with its notation because of the performance ambiguities that plagued this work during his lifetime, but also that as it was essentially his first attempt at it, his preferences for what and how *Sprechstimme* should be notated and performed could also change and evolve. The *Sprechstimme* in *Pierrot lunaire* might indicate a notational deficit, but that does not necessarily indicate composer error in regard to what he envisioned.

Wanting to notate a recitation that was an integral part of the musical texture (and not just overlay as in melodrama or cabaret) was the difficult task with which Schoenberg was faced. The question arose then “whether it is actually possible to *speak* according to a notation devised for *singing*.\(^{40}\) Here is the crux of the matter! Is it simply that *Sprechstimme* is psychologically difficult because the performer has trouble getting beyond that which has for over 400 years represented singing?

The argument exists that if one does not sing the correct pitches the sophisticated canonic writing in number 17, “Parodie,” where the voice is profoundly and motivically

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\(^{39}\) Not generally endorsed by Schoenberg scholars, this is an issue that is frequently debated—and maintained, even—in graduate music classes.

bound with the instruments, is totally lost and then therefore exists only on paper.⁴¹

Nowhere in that particular song does Schoenberg write any special remarks instructing
the Reciter to sing this song more than the others. A crucial point that is often forgotten
when responding to this argument is that even if the pitches are not being performed
accurately, the rhythmic contour of this song is so unique and meticulously crafted that as
long as the vocalist is performing the correct rhythms, it would be almost impossible to
not hear the correlation between the voice and the instruments. For a work without a
preponderance of fixed vocal pitch, why should this one song suddenly be different? The
highly organized, classical technique (the canon) is still aurally identifiable, and as long
as the vocalist attempts to stay in the notated tessitura and accurately execute the
rhythms, the effect should be realized.

That Schoenberg endorsed a Reciter who was an actress by profession speaks
volumes about how Schoenberg envisioned the final product. Stiedry-Wagner rarely
performed any of the notated pitches (that is, arriving at the actual notated pitches and
then falling or rising away from them); she also seldom conformed to the intervals
specified, and occasionally did not even follow Schoenberg’s contour. This could very
easily set a precarious precedent for a carte-blanche execution of *Sprechstimme*. A free-
for-all performance of *Pierrot* hardly seems ideal, but it is clear that Schoenberg
adamantly refused a sung version and that he was more likely “prepared to accept any
pitches whatsoever, with the sole exception of those which he had actually composed.”⁴²
In fact, the preferred end result seems to be that it is better to have unsung incorrect
pitches than sung correct ones.

⁴¹ References to this can be found in the writings of William W. Austin, *Music in the 20th* Century (New
⁴² Stadlen, 8.
Acknowledging the ambiguity as to what Schoenberg wanted is only half the battle. We then must move on to perhaps an even larger problem: how do we actually perform what is on the page? Is Schoenberg’s recording of *Pierrot lunaire* the definitive answer? Stiedry-Wagner’s rendering of the *Sprechstimme* only generally resembles Schoenberg’s score, but because it is Schoenberg’s recording should it be considered the authoritative performance? A composer’s recording of a work is obviously a good place to start when trying to learn the intricacies of a new vocal technique, especially when the composer’s explanatory notes do not fill in all the gaps.  

It is not, however, the *only* way to perform a piece, nor is it necessarily even the definitive performance. The performer certainly has much to bring to the interpretation of a work; the goal is to provide a performance that is not only an accurate and faithful representation of the composer’s desires and instructions (insofar as they are known), but also to provide an effective and artistic performance based on one’s own interpretation and understanding of the score.

The modern interpreter of *Pierrot* certainly has more resources at her disposal than having to rely solely on Schoenberg’s recording. We know, in essence, what *Sprechstimme* should and should not be, how it is notated and what that notation means theoretically, and even the fundamentals of how to perform it. But how does our modern understanding of it relate to what Schoenberg wanted from it, and were those ideals ever realized during his lifetime? If they were not—and all we have to go by are his recordings and writings—how can we have any idea at all of what he truly envisioned for the Reciter?

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43 For example, Luciano Berio’s *Circles* (for voice, percussion, and harp), 1960, presents a score full of symbols indicating “extended” vocal techniques, some of which are briefly explained in a glossary, others of which have no written explanation anywhere. Were it not for Cathy Berberian’s recordings of *Circles* (and indeed, other works by Berio), the modern performer would have few, if any, clues as to how to perform all of the signs and symbols in Berio’s scores.
This paper is not intended to merely provide a general explanation of how to perform *Sprechstimme*. Other authors have attempted to do this without much success for the simple reason that it is almost impossible to *explain* something as specific and idiosyncratic as how one executes the technical demands of *Sprechstimme*.\(^{44}\) Sharon Mabry's dissertation attempts to provide the necessary vocal requirements for *Sprechstimme*, but her suggestions add up to little more than the ingredients to a recipe but without the instructions as to how they go together. Two other articles—by Stadlen and Stein—explain the technical requirements of *Sprechstimme* more by what *not* to do. Indeed that does seem to be the easier, less abstract route to take—defining *Sprechstimme* by explaining what it is *not* and how *not* to do it. *Sprechstimme* is better taught and explained via oral tradition (and in the case of this paper, sound recording tradition) than by anything else. It is the combination of all available resources—Schoenberg’s Preface and score; letters, essays, and interviews; his sound recording; and the last sixty years of sound recording history—that best provides the clues for a modern and accurate performance of *Pierrot lunaire*.

There is simply no way to explain in print every nuance of something as complex as *Sprechstimme*. It cannot all exist in the notation or the Preface or anything else that Schoenberg could have done, short of recording the role of the Reciter himself.\(^{45}\) Even then, how often are we as performers not capable of rendering something as perfectly and

\(^{44}\) See Mabry’s dissertation “Vocal Problems in the Performance of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire*, op. 21”; Peter Stadlen’s article “Schoenberg’s Speech-Song”; and Erwin Stein’s *Orpheus in New Guises*.

\(^{45}\) In a conversation between Pierre Boulez and Theodor Adorno, Boulez provides an anecdote told to him by Leonard Stein (former director of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute in Los Angeles, CA): once, while rehearsing *Ode to Napoleon* in LA, Schoenberg demonstrated a few passages of the *Sprechstimme*. It was completely different than notated. Schoenberg said that in the end, it was the expression that was more important than the notation (Theodor W. Adorno and Pierre Boulez, “Gespräche über den *Pierrot lunaire*,” Interview recorded and transcribed by Rainer Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte* 112/113 (July 2001): 84-86).
clearly as we hear it in our minds? In *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*, Robert
Philip remarks:

> The unnotated levels of freedom and nuance [in performance] . . . are like the gait of a walker, or the inflections of a person’s speech. The question is not “Why is it absent from the notation?” but “How could notation ever be expected to convey all that?” Nobody imagines that the words on a page of a play include all the instructions needed to give a performance. . . .
> . . . even in the work of a composer who notates things very precisely, the relationship between notation and performance is not straightforward.\footnote{Philip, 180-81.}

In the end, all we can do is adhere as faithfully as possible to the Preface and other instructions left to us by Schoenberg, as well as use the numerous sound recordings to help us further define and understand that which Schoenberg has already explained. The value of the *Pierrot lunaire* sound recordings is not to be underestimated. They are not necessarily a short cut as to how to perform a work so that we might imitate what we hear;\footnote{Ibid., 182.} rather they are guideposts that assist us in our own performance practice decision-making process.
CHAPTER TWO

**Pierrot Performances: Early Interpreters and the First Recording**

Albertine Zehme was not only the first Reciter of *Pierrot*, but she was also the only Reciter for the first several years of its performances. Frau Zehme had commissioned the work and spent a considerable amount of her own money in seeing it performed; it is not unusual then that she would have exclusive performance rights for a time after its Berlin premiere in 1912.¹ Prior to the 1912 Schoenberg commission, however, Zehme became interested in the *Pierrot lunaire* poetry through a set of songs composed by Otto Vrieslander in 1904.² Vrieslander’s songs were originally intended to be sung; Zehme, however, converted the songs into recitations, performing twenty-two of them, arranged in three groups, as a melodrama. This performance took place on March 4, 1911 in Berlin. Zehme wrote an essay, which she attached to the program, entitled “Why I Must Speak These Songs” to explain her alteration of the settings from song to recitation:

> The words that we speak should not solely lead to mental concepts, but instead their sounds should allow us to partake of their inner experience. To make this possible we must have an unconstrained freedom of tone. None of the thousand vibrations should be denied to the expression of feeling. I demand tonal freedom, not thoughts!

¹ Brinkmann, *Kritischer Bericht*, 227. According to the signed contract between Schoenberg and Zehme, Zehme was given exclusive performance rights in all countries until April 30, 1915.

² The original cycle of *Pierrot lunaire* poetry, from which Schoenberg chose his twenty-one, was written by the Belgian poet Albert Giraud and published in 1884. It was later translated into German by Otto Erich Hartleben in 1892. Vrieslander’s and Schoenberg’s settings are of Hartleben’s German translation. For more information on other *Pierrot* settings (poetry and music), see Reinhold Brinkmann’s essay “The Fool as Paradigm: Schönberg’s *Pierrot lunaire* and the Modern Artist,” as it appears in Konrad Boehmer’s book *Schönberg and Kandinsky: An Historic Encounter* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 139-68; and Susan Youens’ article “Excavating an Allegory: The Texts of *Pierrot lunaire*,” *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 8 (November 1984): 95-115.
The singing voice, that supernatural, chastely controlled instrument,
... is not suited to strong eruptions of feeling...
Life cannot be exhausted by the beautiful sound alone....
For our poets and composers to communicate, we need both the
tones of song as well as those of speech...  

Zehme originally thought that Schoenberg would write a new set of recitations for
her using twenty Giraud/Hartleben poems of her choosing. She arranged them into three
groups and then framed the entire set with two additional poems, one functioning as an
introduction and the other as a conclusion (a structure similar to her Vrieslander
recitations). Schoenberg and Zehme signed a contract on March 10, 1912, in which the
fee and performance rights were agreed upon. The content of the cycle (which poems
would be set) and the instrumentation, however, were not specified—only that there
would be at least twenty melodramas, and that the accompaniment would be piano, with
the option of adding two more instruments. Though Zehme prepared a specific grouping
of poems to be set, Schoenberg was not required by contract to strictly adhere to her
suggestions. In the end, Schoenberg retained many of Zehme’s preferred poems, but he
also chose several additional poems from the Giraud/Hartleben cycle, changing the
narrative that she had intended.

Motivated by the implications of this commission, he composed the first setting,
“Gebet an Pierrot,” on March 12, and completed the cycle (with the setting of “Die
Kreuze”) on July 9. Edward Steuermann, who was to be the pianist for the premiere,

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3 Simms, 120-21.
4 Ibid., 123.
5 Ibid., 126.
6 “Gebet an Pierrot” eventually became the ninth song in Schoenberg’s complete cycle of twenty-one; “Die
Kreuze” became the fourteenth. The order of songs and dates of composition are well-documented in
Brinkmann’s article on the philology of Pierrot, Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute (June 1987),
11-27.
became Zehme's coach for these songs. Steuermann said that he would anxiously await the delivery of Schoenberg's manuscripts during the months of composition. Steuermann would play through them on the piano and then rush to Frau Zehme's studio to begin work with her. He described it as a rather difficult task—she was an intelligent woman, but being an actress, she was only as musical as was typical of the well-bred German women of the time.\(^7\)

Twenty-five rehearsals between the instrumental ensemble, Zehme, and Schoenberg took place during the summer of 1912. Steuermann and Anton Webern (Schoenberg's pupil) declared that the October 16\(^{th}\) premiere in Berlin was a success, though there was occasional hissing and laughing by audience members during the first and third parts.\(^8\) An American music critic, Arthur M. Abell, from The Musical Courier in New York, confirmed this report but offered a much different personal assessment:

> Schoenberg may be either crazy as a loon . . . or he may be a very clever trickster who is apparently determined [to write music] . . . that in its hideousness and illogical, ear splitting ugliness defies description. . . . Melody he eschews in every form; tonality he knows not and such a word as harmony is not in his vocabulary. . . . The remarkable part of this whole farce is that Schoenberg is taken seriously. A musically cultured audience sits through this atrocity with hardly a protest. . . . He even has adherents who rally round his standard and swear by his muse, declaring that this is the muse of the future. Otto Taubmann, the critic of the Boston Courier, expressed the feelings of all sane musicians when he wrote, "If this is music of the future, then I pray my Creator not to let me live to hear it again."\(^9\)

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\(^7\) Edward Steuermann, "Pierrot lunaire in Retrospect," Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute 2 (October 1977): 50. Beginning in 1891, Zehme studied voice with Cosima Wagner for two years in Bayreuth. She studied the parts of Venus in Tannhäuser, as well as all three Brünnhilde parts in The Ring. Stuckenschmidt, Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work, 196.

\(^8\) Stuckenschmidt, 205.

\(^9\) Brinkmann, Kritischer Bericht, 259-60.
The next performance took place in Hamburg on October 19. Other cities that followed on this premiere tour were Dresden, Breslau, Vienna, Munich, Stuttgart, Mannheim, and Frankfurt.\textsuperscript{10} Stuckenschmidt reported that Zehme wrote seven letters in which she described the performances and the reactions of the public and the press. In several of the cities, she wrote, the reception was favorable but the crowds were small. There were extremely positive reviews from Dresden and Breslau, but at the Munich performance, \textit{Pierrot} was criticized for being “too strongly Viennese.”\textsuperscript{11} In Mannheim and Stuttgart, Schoenberg had received good reviews, but Zehme’s performance was described as “‘crass Dilettantism’.” This, in fact, became the review from many cities: Schoenberg’s music was intriguing, brilliant, and new; the recitation and Zehme’s performance were questionable. In 1920, Scherchen wanted to perform \textit{Pierrot} with another reciter and asked Schoenberg if Zehme had the copyright on the work; if she did, the performance would not take place because, as far as he was concerned, she had ruined the effect of it.\textsuperscript{12}

The performance in Prague in February 1913 saw the most scandalous response yet. People hissed and shouted from the audience, creating such a disruption that Schoenberg and Zehme each individually stopped the program more than once until order was restored.

Schoenberg and Zehme developed a rather close friendship during these months, frequently vacationing with each other’s families in the country. Zehme was a tireless and loyal promoter of Schoenberg’s music, scheduling and financing concerts, and often

\textsuperscript{10} Stuckenschmidt, 204-05. Beginning in Munich and continuing through the last three cities, Hermann Scherchen took over as conductor as Schoenberg had previous concert engagements scheduled in Holland.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 206-07.
asking Schoenberg to allow her to be a part of them.\textsuperscript{13} However by June 1914, Schoenberg’s attitude towards Zehme had begun to change. The conductor of the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, Alexander Siloti, wrote Schoenberg a letter asking him to guest conduct his Chamber Symphony and \textit{Pierrot} with Zehme. Schoenberg was thrilled at the request but asked that the performances be postponed until 1915 or 1916. He stated that he could not put his reasons in writing, but that he would soon call Siloti with the details. Schoenberg did write, however, “For the moment I can only say this: it is at least as much in your interest as in mine, that you don’t do it this year. You can certainly write to Frau Zehme that unfortunately it is not possible this year. \textit{Pierrot} would be a mistake this year, and it might spoil the success of the Chamber Symphony.”\textsuperscript{14} Stuckenschmidt believed that this was a clear indication that Schoenberg had misgivings about Zehme’s performances, and that Schoenberg was requesting that Siloti wait until Zehme’s contracted performance rights had expired.

\textit{Zehme and Schoenberg had a somewhat difficult relationship in the months and years following her \textit{Gurre-Lieder} performance.}\textsuperscript{15} Stuckenschmidt chronicles the story in which Zehme attempted to correspond frequently with Schoenberg during the following ten years. In January 1918, Schoenberg wrote a letter to Zehme asking her to return the score and parts to \textit{Pierrot}. She reacted violently, wrote him a letter in which she called him a “satan” and a “sadist,” and refused to return the materials to Schoenberg. By

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 205-07. Zehme had been studying the role of the \textit{Sprecher} in \textit{Gurre-Lieder} and had hoped to perform it at its premiere in Vienna in 1913 (the day before the Prague \textit{Pierrot} scandal). She did not, and though this role was conceived for a male voice, Zehme continued to ask Schoenberg to cast her in the part. In March 1914, \textit{Gurre-Lieder}’s first performance in Germany took place—financed entirely by Zehme’s husband—and Zehme spoke the role of the \textit{Sprecher}.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 211-12; Stein, \textit{Arnold Schoenberg Letters}, 51-52.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} For a more detailed accounting of Albertine Zehme’s history and her dealings with Schoenberg, see the chapter “Three times seven recitations” in Stuckenschmidt’s book, \textit{Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work}, 195-217.
\end{itemize}
March she had calmed down and attempted to restore her once amicable relationship with Schoenberg. The damage had been done, however, and Schoenberg never corresponded with her again, except for one brief letter in July 1924.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Pierrot's Other Interpreters}

In addition to Zehme, three other women frequently performed the role of the Reciter during Schoenberg’s lifetime: Erika Stiedry-Wagner, Marie Gutheil-Schoder, and Marya Freund. Stiedry-Wagner is perhaps most well-known due to the number of concerts she performed with Schoenberg for over two decades, and her 1940 recording of \textit{Pierrot}. As previously mentioned, Schoenberg apparently approved of her interpretation more than any other, and while it errs on the side of being more spoken, Schoenberg preferred this over a more sung interpretation.\textsuperscript{17} Gutheil-Schoder and Freund were both well-established, successful sopranos who had major careers in the European opera houses, as well as in concert and recital. As Schoenberg showed preference for a more spoken rendering of \textit{Pierrot}, it is not difficult to imagine that he would not react as enthusiastically to the interpretations by two well-trained classical singers who tended to sing the \textit{Pierrot} settings more than speak them.

It was during Schoenberg’s post-World War I years in Mödling that his friendship began with Erika Stiedry-Wagner and her husband, Dr. Fritz Stiedry. Having met in 1920, they remained friends until Schoenberg’s death in 1951. An actress by profession, Stiedry-Wagner had some musical training and was asked in early 1921 by Erwin Stein—an Austrian critic and writer who also had studied with Schoenberg—to perform \textit{Pierrot}.

\textsuperscript{16} Stuckenschmidt, 212, 216. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Rufer, 40; Smith, \textit{Perspectives of New Music}, 275-78; Smith, \textit{Schoenberg and His Circle}, 99-100; Stein, \textit{Arnold Schoenberg Letters}, 149.
lunaire on a concert of the Verein für Musikalische Privataufführungen (Society for Private Musical Performances). Developed by Schoenberg and his followers, this organization was formed in 1918 to promote and encourage the performance of contemporary musical works—"Mahler to the present." The goal was to give clear, well-prepared concerts of modern music for which there would be ample rehearsal time.18

And so, during the spring of 1921, Stiedry-Wagner began rehearsals of Pierrot with Stein, and later, with Schoenberg himself. She performed Pierrot four times in Vienna in the late spring 1921, and twice in Prague during the 1921-22 season.19 Stiedry-Wagner later recalled that not only was the Sprechstimme difficult to master, but also that the rhythm itself was extremely complex, thus requiring numerous hours of rehearsal. Just as Steuermann had coached Zehme in the role, so did Stein rehearse it with Stiedry-Wagner until she was comfortable with her part. She emphasized that in her rehearsals with Schoenberg, he frequently told her that it was very wrong to sing it. She continued, "He always said that to me. And he was satisfied because I was—I mean I am not a musician, but I was quite musical and I could speak and I could give expression."20

Stein conducted Pierrot on tour with Stiedry-Wagner in 1923, and though she had already rehearsed and performed it, Schoenberg scheduled thirty rehearsals with the ensemble before an Italian tour during the spring of 1924. This tour proved to be most successful for Schoenberg and Stiedry-Wagner. Giacomo Puccini traveled six hours to

18 Smith, Schoenberg and His Circle, 81-82.
19 Ibid., 87. These rehearsals and performances came about after Stiedry-Wagner replaced Marie Gutheil-Schoder who had been rehearsing with Stein since November 1920. See also Bryan Simms, “The Society for Private Musical Performances: Resources and Documents,” Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute 3 (October 1979): 136-42.
20 Ibid., 100.
the performance in Florence and had asked the Italian composer, Alfredo Casella, to introduce him to Schoenberg.\textsuperscript{21}

Erika and Fritz Stiedry remained close friends with Schoenberg and continued to perform together frequently. Stiedry-Wagner performed \textit{Pierrot} numerous times throughout Europe and America, and was chosen to record it with Schoenberg in September 1940. Even up until his death, Schoenberg admired Stiedry-Wagner’s abilities and frequently recommended her to colleagues.\textsuperscript{22} Shortly before his death in 1951, in a letter written to Fritz Stiedry, Schoenberg included a postscript to Frau Stiedry-Wagner in which he expressed his happiness for her and congratulated her on her many \textit{Pierrot} successes.\textsuperscript{23}

German soprano Marie Gutheil-Schoder, a friend of Gustav Mahler and a frequent performer under his direction at the Vienna Hofoper, was also a great proponent of modern music and sang the premiere of Schoenberg’s Second String Quartet in December 1908, as well as the premiere of the monodrama, \textit{Erwartung}, in Prague in 1924. Mahler likely introduced Gutheil-Schoder to Schoenberg sometime after 1903 when Schoenberg had returned to Vienna after living in Berlin since 1901. Schoenberg greatly admired Gutheil-Schoder’s abilities as a singer and musician, and actually composed \textit{Erwartung} during the summer of 1909 with her voice in mind. In a letter to Gutheil-Schoder from Berlin in August 1913, Schoenberg wrote:

\begin{quote}
You will remember that I have repeatedly spoken to you of a dramatic work in which there is a part for you. It is a monodrama,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{21} Stuckenschmidt, 294.
\textsuperscript{22} Stein, \textit{Arnold Schoenberg Letters}, 282. In July of 1950, Thor Johnson of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra was looking for performers for upcoming performances of the \textit{Gurre-Lieder}. Schoenberg wholeheartedly recommended Erika Stiedry-Wagner for the role of the \textit{Sprecher} in spite of it having been written for a high male speaking voice.
with only one part, a real part, conceived as a Gutheil-part. . . . Please be so kind as to read the enclosed libretto (I have not got the piano reduction with me at the moment) . . .

There remains . . . whether it suits your voice. But that you can answer only when I send you the reduction.

The thing is musically very difficult. But then, after all, you did manage my 2nd Quartet!!!

Gutheil-Schoder eagerly accepted Schoenberg's request and learned the part; because of the outbreak of World War I, however, the premiere was delayed until 1924.25

During the fall of 1920, Gutheil-Schoder had begun rehearsals for the Reciter in *Pierrot* with Erwin Stein. According to Smith and Simms, difficulties arose, and although Schoenberg vehemently disapproved, Stein replaced her with Stiedry-Wagner.26

However, Stuckenschmidt merely speaks of Gutheil-Schoder during this period as not having enough time for rehearsals and was therefore replaced.27 In a letter written during the summer of 1922, Schoenberg expressed to Gutheil-Schoder his most sincere apologies for offending or hurting her feelings. He wanted her to know that he held her in the highest regard, and hoped that he had not done irreparable damage to their friendship. Ironically, he no longer recalled exactly what happened to cause the rift, but that he remembered discussing it with Stein at the time, and so he would ask Stein about it to refresh his memory. In a footnote to this letter, Stein recounts that Gutheil-Schoder had, indeed, been studying the *Sprechstimme* part in *Pierrot* with him that autumn, but as she did not have enough time to rehearse, Frau Stiedry-Wagner was engaged for the

25 Helga Pilarczyk, a well-known German soprano, was also a greatly admired (and one of the most famous) interpreter of the Woman in *Erwartung*. She also performed the leading roles in Berg's *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*, in addition to several other operas by modern composers. She was also a well-known interpreter of *Pierrot lunaire*, and recorded it in 1961 with Pierre Boulez. Her interpretation is one of the most spoken in the *Pierrot* discography.
performances.\textsuperscript{28} Having already rehearsed it with Stein and Karl Rankl (Austrian composer and conductor), Gutheil-Schoder wrote to Schoenberg in October 1921 that she would be performing it in Copenhagen in November. She said that she had worked with a speech trainer during the summer which helped her interpretation greatly. Feeling confident with her ability to execute the \textit{Sprechstimme} accurately, her chief concerns, at this juncture, were with mood and expression.\textsuperscript{29}

The most successful performance of \textit{Pierrot} from the public’s point-of-view, according to Stuckenschmidt, took place at the Berlin Singakademie on January 5, 1924. In a hall that was filled to capacity, Gutheil-Schoder performed the role of the Speaker, and Fritz Stiedry conducted.\textsuperscript{30}

Polish-born French soprano, Marya Freund, was not deterred by Schoenberg’s objections to the manner in which she performed the \textit{Sprechstimme. Pierrot lunaire}, in fact, remained a staple in her repertoire throughout much of her life, and she continued to perform it even into the 1950s. She corresponded with Schoenberg through much of her life, and wrote a final letter to him in 1949 to describe how well-received her performances had been in London, Brussels, and Paris.\textsuperscript{31} Unlike Gutheil-Schoder, who had primarily made her living as an opera singer (first in Weimar and then in Vienna), Freund’s career was defined by her concert work and recitals, and she frequently performed the works of contemporary composers such as Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Ravel, Bloch, and Milhaud. She and Schoenberg developed a close friendship—in spite of their

\textsuperscript{28} Stein, 73.
\textsuperscript{29} Stuckenschmidt, 277.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 217.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 507.
disagreements about *Pierrot* interpretation—and the two corresponded from 1912-1949. By Schoenberg’s request she sang Tove in the premiere of the *Gurre-Lieder*, and also frequently performed the Opus 15 Stefan George songs, *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten*.

In November 1920, Freund wrote to Schoenberg on behalf of Maurice Ravel, who was very enthused about the work, to request permission for a performance in Paris with Ravel conducting. The plan did not come to fruition that year, but did at a later date, and with Darius Milhaud conducting. After the Paris performances in 1921, Milhaud and Freund were in Vienna to appear in concerts of French music. Milhaud paid a visit to Schoenberg to tell him of the Paris success (which had already been reported to him in a letter from Egon Wellesz), during which, he said, Schoenberg suggested the afternoon at Alma Werfel-Mahler’s home, juxtaposing the two interpretations: Stiedry-Wagner’s in German, more *gesprochen*, and with Schoenberg conducting, and Freund’s in French, more *gesungen*, and with Milhaud conducting. Because of German anti-sentiment in France, Freund initially attempted to learn *Pierrot* with Albert Giraud’s original French text, but she found that it was not a poetic text suitable for singing. She re-translated the entire cycle and used the new translation for this occasion, as well as for several performances in France and Belgium. Schoenberg scarcely recognized his own work when performed by Freund, although Mahler-Werfel said it was the preferred rendition.

In August 1922, a month after the “dueling” *Pierrots*, Schoenberg wrote a letter to Freund, attempting to explain to her the errors in her interpretation:

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32 Ibid., 100.
33 Ibid., 270-72, 283; Smith, *Schoenberg and His Circle*, 87.
34 Stuckenschmidt says Alma Werfel-Mahler suggested the get-together; Smith says that Milhaud did.
35 Smith, *Schoenberg and His Circle*, 87.
36 Mahler-Werfel, 128, as quoted in Smith, 88.
There are a number of things regarding the performance of my works that I should like to talk over with you. I am anxious to explain to you why I cannot allow any will but mine to prevail in realising [sic] the musical thoughts that I have recorded on paper, . . . I should very much like to do some thorough rehearsing with you . . . I am quite convinced that you will soon feel at home with them: you would only have to hear it once directly from me . . .  

The FirstRecording

The first recording of Pierrot with Schoenberg conducting and Erika Stiedry-Wagner reciting took place early in the fall of 1940. With little time to rehearse (though the entire ensemble had performed it together many times over the years), Schoenberg sent a letter to Fritz and Erika Stiedry in which he expressed some trepidation in trying to prepare the score for recording with only two weeks of rehearsal time. He felt that the speaking part should be freshened up a bit in that they should return to the “light, ironical, satirical tone in which the piece was actually conceived.”

The entire cycle of songs was recorded on September 25 and 26 in Los Angeles, California. Dika Newlin, a young composition student of Schoenberg’s, was allowed to be at the recording sessions, as well as a few of the rehearsals. In her published diaries, she details the nerve-wracking experience for the performers and listeners. Schoenberg shook and trembled, and Stiedry-Wagner had practically lost her voice by the end of the recording session.  

Years later, when speaking of the recording sessions, Stiedry-Wagner mused to Joan Smith about her argument with Schoenberg during these two days. Schoenberg was

37 Stein, Arnold Schoenberg Letters, 74; Stuckenschmidt, 283. Also quoted partially in Chapter One, footnote 20.
38 Rufer, 40.
annoyed at the overemphasis put on the Reciter. He was adamant that the Speaker was merely another instrument in the ensemble and should therefore not be given any more consideration than any of the other instruments. Because of this, he was afraid that if Stiedry-Wagner were too close to the microphone in the recording session, her voice would be heard well above the rest of the ensemble, thus making it a piece for Speaker with instrumental accompaniment, as opposed to all the forces truly acting as an ensemble.\textsuperscript{40} Stiedry-Wagner’s recounting of the story continues:

And he [Schoenberg] said to me, “Go away, go away from the microphone.” I said, “No, Mr. Schoenberg. That is no good. I know. I did a lot of things at the radio and I know how my voice sounds.” . . . And so, I really had a temper with him, and I said, “No, you won’t hear me.” And he said, “No, I know it’s better.” And so on, so on. And we nearly didn’t finish it. And, later on, he said, “Oh, you were right. I was stubborn.” So my voice on the recording is too soft—much, much, sometimes much too soft.\textsuperscript{41}

Schoenberg’s previously-cited letter to Hans Rosbaud in 1949 explains Schoenberg’s position, and his subsequent regrets:

I do not know whether you are familiar with the records that I made of it. In some respects . . . they are really good, even very good. They are not so good with respect to the balance of instruments and recitation. I was a little annoyed by the overemphasis of the speaker—who, after all, never sings the theme, but, at most, speaks against it, while the themes (and everything else of musical importance) happen in the instruments. Perhaps, because I was annoyed, I reacted a little too violently, out of contrariness, and forgot that one must, after all, be able to hear the speaker. So now she is really drowned out in several places. That should not be.\textsuperscript{42}

The Schoenberg/Stiedry-Wagner recording was well-received and, incidentally, was the only commercial recording of the work made during Schoenberg’s lifetime. In

\textsuperscript{40} Smith, \textit{Perspectives of New Music}, 277.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Rufer, 40.
the five years following Schoenberg’s death, no fewer than six commercial recordings were made, most of which included key participants who had been friends and/or colleagues of Schoenberg (Edward Steuermann, Hans Rosbaud, René Leibowitz, Peter Stadlen, to name a few). Perhaps these and other conductors were unwilling to make a permanent contribution to the *Pierrot* discography while Schoenberg was still alive.

The noticeable absence of other recordings during Schoenberg’s lifetime certainly brings to the forefront the question of composer authority. Is Schoenberg’s recording the definitive and authoritative version of the work? Is there room for improvement, different interpretations, and new ideas? Though Schoenberg was well-known for being rather controlling, surely he could allow for alternate interpretations of the *Sprechstimme*. This technique was not, after all, an exact science that could be easily replicated by any vocalist. Schoenberg himself expressed continued dissatisfaction with the role of the Reciter. His letter to Hans Rosbaud not only addresses the issue of balance between the Speaker and the instruments on the recording, but also lists all the things about the recording that are very good—tempo, presentation of mood, and the playing of the instrumentalists. The omission of the Speaker from this list of virtues is, perhaps, an attempt by Schoenberg to insinuate his continued frustration with the role of the Reciter without directly calling attention to or insulting Stiedry-Wagner’s rendering. In a letter written to Stein on December 25, 1941, Schoenberg was not so vague:

> They [the Columbia records] are to a great part quite good, though Mrs. Stiedry is never in pitch and several pieces are not very well recorded.\(^{43}\)

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\(^{43}\) Arnold Schoenberg to Erwin Stein, 25 December 1941; Online Archive of Correspondence, Arnold Schönberg Center.
Schoenberg admired Stiedry-Wagner immensely; it is the recitation itself—the technique required to deliver the *Sprechstimme*—which continued to vex Schoenberg throughout his career. Perhaps it was this dissatisfaction that led Schoenberg to change the notation of *Sprechstimme* in *A Survivor from Warsaw* and *Ode to Napoleon*. 
CHAPTER THREE

*Sprechstimme* Performance Styles: an Overview

The vocal interpretations of *Pierrot lunaire*, as represented on the thirty-six recordings (of the more than forty-five listed in Wayne Shoaf’s official discography) reviewed and analyzed for this document, are as varied as one can imagine.¹ No two recordings are alike, and even separate recordings made by the same vocalist or conductor often bear little resemblance to each other.²

There will, of course, be differences in interpretations, and such differences should be celebrated and embraced. An interpretation, however, which deviates from the score so drastically that it is no longer a faithful representation of Schoenberg’s composition is emblematic of a greater problem: where does one draw the line between compliance with the score (and the composer’s intent, inasmuch as it can be known) and the performer’s artistic license? This has become the difficult task of the interpreter and perhaps to a lesser extent, the listener. Several of the recordings from the last fifty years offer interpretations which are decidedly not what Schoenberg intended: they are too sung; they ignore register and tessitura; they do not present the rhythm accurately. But there are additional elements important to the execution of *Sprechstimme* which Schoenberg never expressly addressed: vibrato, characterization, voice type (*fach*), to name a few. Because Schoenberg did not address these issues, are we to assume that they are not important or necessary or even that he did not intend for them to be a part of the *Sprechstimme* equation? Just because Schoenberg did not address them does not mean

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¹ See Appendix A for a full chronological listing of the *Pierrot lunaire* discography.
² Pierre Boulez’s three recordings are an exceptionally good example of this; all of Boulez’s recordings are discussed in detail in Chapter Five.
that they do not or should not exist. The objective here is to present the interpretational possibilities as heard in the recordings, determine what works and what does not work and why, and then attempt to construct guidelines to aid future interpreters in the translation of Schoenberg’s rich, complex score.

**Scope of Performance Styles**

These recordings represent a wide array of *Sprechstimme* performance styles that include:

- Execution of the *Sprechstimme* which is more sung or more spoken;
- Vibrato or straight tone;
- *Portamento* or sliding/gliding between the notes;
- Strictly adhering to the exact pitches that are written, attempting to maintain correct intervals, or simply following the contour of the line; versus a completely free interpretation in which Schoenberg’s pitches and intervals are not maintained, nor is the contour strictly observed.

Other factors which are somewhat less directly related to the *Sprechstimme* itself, but rather to the overall form and presentation of the work, include:

- Tempo;
- Use of different “character” voices by the singer;
- Language of the recitation;
- The singer’s voice type (*fach*) and training; and
- Whether or not a conductor is used.
Not surprisingly, many of the recordings—particularly the recordings of the last twenty to thirty years—tend to be more sung in nature. Since Pierrot lunaire has become the regular domain of singers and not actresses, it is to be expected that the singer’s interpretation would gravitate towards singing and away from speaking. And yet within the discography, there are numerous examples of incorrectly sung interpretations—performances in which the pitches are sung, but not the ones Schoenberg actually wrote.\(^3\) Even “perfectly” sung performances are rarely flawless; pitch error is not acceptable in Schubert or Mozart, but because of the extremely challenging vocal line in Pierrot, a few mistakes are allowed and even to be expected. While the recordings that fall into the “sung” category may sound slightly more accessible to the lay listener (because of the familiarity of classical vibrato), these performances lack a certain depth of character and atmosphere that is present in the more speech-like recordings.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are interpretations—much like the early ones by Zehme and Stiedry-Wagner—which are more spoken. Performances with little to no pitch or register accuracy of any kind (even the gesungen pitches) have a certain flatness of color, and do not entice the listener to remain engaged. Schoenberg’s score, as notated pitch-wise for the vocalist, spans two and a half octaves. Performers who present Pierrot with a more spoken delivery (in terms of range) generally do not access the high and low extremes of their voices, thus presenting a very one-dimensional, monochromatic recitation. Speech patterns tend to lie within a very limited range, and usually do not include the higher partials or “head voice.” Because the more spoken

\(^3\) For example, Patricia Rideout/no conductor (1974); Leslie Boucher/Lewis Nielson (1993); Ilona Steingruber-Wildgans/Vladimir Golschmann(1961). For full recording information, please see Appendix A.
performances tend to lie within the speech part of the voice, the performer rarely accesses notes above what can be executed in “chest voice.”

The next category, briefly discussed in Chapter One, includes the use of vibrato versus straight tone in the delivery of the vocal line. Vibrato is a crucial element in distinguishing sung passages from Sprechstimme passages because the “impression of singing in fact results from the minute fluctuations of pitch that comprise vibrato. A voice production avoiding vibrato . . . [can convey] the prescribed pitches without violating the taboo on singing.”\(^4\) We perceive singing based largely on the presence or absence of vibrato. Because there are pitches that are specifically marked to be sung, the performer must be able to execute the vocal line using two different techniques. It is probable that Schoenberg had this in mind when he wrote these passages into the score—that the gesungen passages would be sung with vibrato, whereas the gesprochen portions (that is, anything notated as Sprechstimme) would be rendered without vibrato. This provides little difficulty for most performers on short note-values. It is much easier for the performer to assume a more speech-like quality on words with shorter note-values: there is little time for purposeful vibrato, vowel extension becomes a non-issue, and the need to slide or portamento between the notes is eliminated. The challenge exists when the note values are much longer than normal speech. The performer becomes aware of duration and must choose to vibrate or sing straight tone on the vowel, or cut short the prescribed duration by closing down on the vowel in anticipation of the next consonant. This final option is clearly prohibited by Schoenberg’s Preface as it would alter his precise rhythmic notation; therefore, the performer really only has two options: vibrato or non-vibrato. Again, if the piece is performed with vibrato on every tone, it is not possible

\(^4\) Stadlen, 10.
to differentiate between *gesungen* and *gesprochen*. If the performer never vibrates and
sings straight on every note, again, there is no perceptible difference in performance
styles. It is likely, then, that Schoenberg intended a vocal style which would require
vibrato on the pitches that are to be sung, and a straighter tone for the pitches marked as
*Sprechstimme*.

The question of what to do between the notes has already briefly been addressed
in Chapter One. There are essentially two ways to fill in the space between the notes,
*portamento* and sliding. An issue directly related to this is the direction in which the
performer will *portamento* or slide. It is usually assumed that one should follow the
contour of the line which would then require many slides up and down. Most performers,
however, glide down much more frequently than up. Erwin Stein even acknowledges
that this should be the case; inasmuch as one is supposed to connect the notes one to the
next, the upward glide will be rarer than the descending glide (as is common with natural
speech). This means that there are instances when the performer will not slide/glide
between every note.

Every note must be touched and at once abandoned by gliding
down (if no other direction is given) as far as is natural in elevated
speech. . . .

The rarer instances of raising the voice within a syllable will
best be realized if the sound of, say, a surprised "Oh?" is re-
membered. The upward glide usually serves to render an intensely
emotional or comical expression, for instance on the italicized
syllables in "Steig o Mutter aller Schmerzen" (*Madonna*, m. 11)
or "behaglich" (*Gemeinheit*, m. 20).\(^5\)

Schoenberg did not address this, and so there do not seem to be any standardized
guidelines in regard to the up-glide/slide. It is not, however, effective to slide between
every note throughout the work. The majority of the recorded interpretations tend to

support Stein’s comments, and the recordings which do make a point of sliding between almost every note are an exception and not among the most effective, compelling recordings. Stein continues:

The dropping and raising of the voice should not link the intervals in the way of a *portamento* except in those *rare* [my italics] places where such an effect is specially indicated, e.g. in Rote Messe, bars 11 and 12, on the word “zerreißt”. Otherwise, the glide off the initial note should pay as little regard to the pitch of the succeeding note as does a glide in ordinary speech.

Numerous interpreters also utilize the *portamento* too frequently, and in some cases, use it as their only method of traveling between pitches. Other performers erratically volley back and forth between *portamento* and sliding so that there is little consistency in the interpretation.

Regarding the exact versus free interpretation of pitch, it would be natural to assume that a performer either executes the pitches as written, or she does not. And yet, the majority of the recordings fall into a category somewhere between the two: first, a performer may not reproduce any of the pitches correctly but still accurately follow the rise and fall of the line, thus maintaining the basic contour of the vocal line; second, she may not duplicate *all* of the correct pitches, but still attempts to maintain the intervallic integrity of the line by pitching the line in a place more comfortable for her individual voice. And then there are the two “extremes”: a basic free-for-all where the interpreter does not allow herself to be guided by anything on the page—an interpretation where the correct notes are rarely attained and the contour is a design of her choosing; and the strict,

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6 Erika Sziklay/András Mihály (1970)
7 Stein, 87. See Chapter One, Figure 1. 8, p. 21.
8 Mary Thomas/David Atherton (1973); Alice Howland/Arthur Winograd (1955) and Herbert Zipper (1962)—all have an intrusive and excessive use of *portamento* and vibrato.
9 Phyllis Bryn-Julson/Peter Eötvös (1991) and Robert Black (1992); Sophie Boulin/Paul Mefano (1996).
"textbook" interpretation of the recitation line where the performer accurately reproduces every pitch exactly as notated by Schoenberg, and immediately leaves it in anticipation of the next pitch.\(^{10}\) Surprisingly, within any of these styles of pitch delivery, the gesungen passages are correct (or very close to) more often than not.

The Preface does not specifically address the issue of intervallic integrity; rather, it simply says that the written pitch is to be taken into account. Stein interprets this (and perhaps based on his rehearsals with Schoenberg) as intervallic integrity. He wrote:

Though shown in absolute pitch notation, the intervals are only meant to be relative. The initial note is so short that it is of no harmonic consequence. The reciter is therefore free not only to transpose his part according to the type of his speaking voice and regardless of the other instruments, but also to narrow down his intervals so as to accommodate them within his individual (speaking) compass and tessitura. . . . What is essential is that the proportions of the melodic line be retained: a high note has to be relatively high, a low note relatively low; a fourth must be a wider leap than a third, and a minor second a smaller step than a major second.\(^{11}\)

Song number six, "Madonna," is an example which seems to support Stein's supposition. At m. 10 Schoenberg writes above the vocal line, "very high, but extremely sweet."\(^{12}\) The Sprechstimme pitch as written is E\(_5\). Schoenberg's note clearly indicates that whatever pitch the Reciter chooses to "sing," it must be a very high pitch, but not necessarily E\(_5\).

It is difficult to separate these style characteristics into individual categories as there is considerable overlap between groupings, and very rarely is one trait independent

\(^{10}\) The two extremes are rarely represented in the recordings; most recordings fall into the first two categories. Recordings that fall into the first category are generally some of the earlier examples: Jeanne Héricard/Hans Rosbaud (1957); Alice Howland/Arthur Winograd (1955) and Herbert Zipper (1962); Ellen Adler/René Leibowitz (1951). Within the second category, there are several recordings in which the performer does accurately reproduce many of the correct pitches, but not all, and therefore at least attempts to maintain the intervallic integrity of the line. Two prominent recordings are indicative of this style: Jan DeGaetani/Arthur Weisberg (1970) and Lucy Shelton/no conductor (1990).

\(^{11}\) Stein, Orpheus, 88.

\(^{12}\) "sehr hoch, aber äußerst zart"
of the others. For example, the issues of sung/spoken, vibrato/straight-tone, 
portamento/sliding, and exact pitch/free pitch are all inextricably woven together. A 
performance that is more sung will generally have more vibrato and portamento, but it 
may not be at all accurate in regard to pitch. Likewise, a more spoken rendering will 
usually have less vibrato and more sliding (or perhaps there will be very little to no 
motion between the notes), but still attempt to maintain the intervallic integrity of the 
original line.

Other aspects of delivery and execution—tempo and characterization—were 
briefly discussed in Chapter One. Regarding presentational issues not previously 
discussed, a brief mention of language of recitation, voice fach/training, and use of a 
conductor should be mentioned here. Though Pierrot lunaire was occasionally presented 
in French (using Marya Freund's translation) during Schoenberg's lifetime, the "original" 
German has remained the standard performance language. Three recordings have been 
made in alternate languages: an incomplete performance in Czech recorded in 1987 by 
Renée Nachtigallová and conducted by Jiri Malát, and full performances in English by 
jazz singer Cleo Laine and the Nash Ensemble (conducted by Elgar Howarth), as well as 
Lucy Shelton's commercially successful recording in 1990 with the Da Capo Chamber 
Players. 13

It is well-known that Schoenberg whole-heartedly approved of the translation of 
his works into English for the better enjoyment of English-speaking audiences. In 1940,

13 I have not had the privilege of hearing the Czech recording. This recording only includes the 4th, 7th, 9th, 
and 19th-21st songs. Lucy Shelton's English recording is readily available—it follows the German 
performance of Pierrot lunaire on the same disc. Shelton's is also one of only four recorded performances 
which do not use a conductor. The other three are the Patricia Rideout's recording of 1974 with Glenn 
Gould at the piano (this is also not a complete recording—only songs 1-7 are recorded), Gerda Hartman's 
1987 recording with the Ensemble Kaleidocollage, and Anne-Marie Donovan's 1995 recording with the 
Blue Rider Ensemble.
during the rehearsals for the Columbia recording with Stiedry-Wagner, Schoenberg asked one of his students, Dika Newlin, to begin work on a translation into English from the German. Newlin completed the entire work overnight and reported that Schoenberg was extremely pleased with it. Schoenberg asked if it were possible to recite it with the music; Newlin responded that she had worked to maintain the original meter except where it absolutely had to be changed so that the English verse would sound natural. 14 Schoenberg and his wife, Gertrude, made several corrections to Newlin’s translation, in hopes that it would eventually fit the music well enough to be used in performance, as well as in a published English edition. 15 He also hoped that Newlin’s translation would be included when the Pierrot recording was released. It was not, nor was any other translation. In letters written to Moses Smith and Goddard Lieberson, both of Columbia Recording, Schoenberg strongly advised that they use Newlin’s translation, which he said had been revised by several people and was an excellent translation. 16 In August 1941, Schoenberg wrote a letter to Mrs. Claire Reis of the League of Composers in New York City stating that he had submitted a “very good translation” (Newlin’s translation) to Columbia Records which was not accepted. He continued, “... that they add no text at all is a complete surprise to me and a great damage to the effect these records cou[l]d produce.” 17

14 Newlin, 254-55.
15 Ibid., 258.
16 Arnold Schoenberg to Mr. Moses Smith, Director, Columbia Recording Corporation, 30 September 1940; Arnold Schoenberg to Mr. Goddard Lieberson, Columbia Recording Corporation, 13 February 1941. Online Archive of Correspondence, Arnold Schönberg Center.
17 Arnold Schoenberg to Mrs. Claire Reis, 24 August 1941. Online Archive of Correspondence, Arnold Schönberg Center.
In the years following the Columbia release of *Pierrot lunaire*, numerous other translations were made. In March 1941, Erwin Stein wrote to Schoenberg that he had begun work on a *Pierrot* translation; Schoenberg responded in April, explaining that he could not even look at Stein's translations as he had already submitted Newlin's for the recording. Though he approved of Newlin's translations, Schoenberg later expressed that there were better translations available, including Stein's (though Schoenberg had apparently not seen it at the time), as well as one by Jean Jackson and Felix Khuner.

As to the singability of Newlin's translation, it is likely that Schoenberg did consider it singable, with the text well-suited for the music. In several letters, Schoenberg expressed his frustration that the Columbia recording was made in German and not in English. In a 1942 letter to Stein, Schoenberg wrote:

Now I want to make the suggestion, that you record your performance. [Mine] is unfortunately in spite of my protest, in German, which is much in the way to a full success ...

And in a much later letter from 1949 to Hugo Winter of Associated Music Publishers:

I am very much in favor however, to record an English version of *Pierrot Lunaire*. It was only the stubborness [sic] of Columbia that the first recording was not made in English. On my advice a performance in Los Angeles has been given in English, and the translation is seemingly so good that I would prefer to use this.

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18 In the Schoenberg correspondence, there are references to a possible translation by Nicholas Slonimsky, as well as translations from at least four other sources, including Ingolf Dahl in cooperation with a co-translator (referred to as Herr Beier), and Erwin Stein.

19 Arnold Schoenberg to Erwin Stein, 12 April 1941. Online Archive of Correspondence, Arnold Schönberg Center.

20 Arnold Schoenberg to Erwin Stein, 25 December 1941; Arnold Schoenberg to Felix Greissle, G. Schirmer, Symphonic Orchestra Department, 21 August 1944. Online Archive of Correspondence, Arnold Schönberg Center.

21 Arnold Schoenberg to Erwin Stein, 1 October 1942. Online Archive of Correspondence, Arnold Schönberg Center.

22 Arnold Schoenberg to Hugo Winter, 1 July 1949. Online Archive of Correspondence, Arnold Schönberg Center. The Los Angeles performance likely used the Dahl-Beier translation.
Schoenberg also sanctioned the performance of an English translation of another frequently-performed work during this time, the *Gurre-Lieder*. In his July 1950 letter to Thor Johnson of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Schoenberg wrote:

One thing,  
`ONE THING IS VERY IMPORTANT:`

Make the performance in *ENGLISH* not in German. People do not understand German, neither here, nor in Australia, England, Canada and in many other places. . . . There is no reason why it should be given in German.²³

If Schoenberg felt so strongly that a German work should be performed in English in English-speaking countries, it is not too much of a stretch to suggest that he would not object to a work being translated into other languages so that the text could be understood, as long as the translation remains singable. Though René Leibowitz’s recordings (with Ellen Adler in 1951 and Ethel Semser in 1954) were both recorded in German, Schoenberg wrote to Hugo Winter in 1949 that he assumed it would be in French. There is no indication in the letter that Schoenberg had any objection to this.²⁴

In regard to voice *fach* and vocal training, *Pierrot* requires a very special voice—not just musician—to be able to perform it. Certainly the technical and musical demands on the singer are great, but these are challenges that could be met by anyone with the desire and ability to do so. But for which voice type is *Pierrot* truly best-suited? More recordings have been made by sopranos than mezzo sopranos; however, based on range and tessitura, it is perhaps better suited for the mezzo soprano instrument. Though Stein and Boulez both have said that *Pierrot* is not well-suited for any one specific voice

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²⁴ Arnold Schoenberg to Hugo Winter, 1 July 1949. Online Archive of Correspondence, Arnold Schönberg Center.
type, it is likely that a mezzo soprano would have greater control and color possibilities throughout the whole of the range required.

The pitches as notated encompass a wide range—from E-flat₃ (below Middle C) to A-flat₃. The difficulty here is not in the high writing (any mezzo or soprano will have A-flat at her disposal), but rather in the middle and low writing. The three sung notes in m. 10 of “Nacht” are perhaps the most famous example. The voice sings, instead of speaks, the important three-note cell upon which this passacaglia is based:

Figure 3.1: Schoenberg, *Pierrot lunaire*, "Nacht," m. 10.

Schoenberg instructs the Reciter to sing “where possible, the lowest notes”; he included an ossia version notated an octave higher, but clearly preferred the originally-written octave. Not every singer is going to have these notes at her disposal—including some mezzo sopranos—and even when she does, they are not always rendered effectively. Approximately half of the thirty-six recordings listened to for this document execute m. 10 relatively accurately; the majority of the other half are made up of attempts to sing the

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25 Stein, *Orpheus in New Guises*, 88, said that there will hardly be a voice capable of executing the full range of the part; and Boulez, *Orientations*, 333, said that the speaking voice in *Pierrot* is both too high and too low for any one singer.

26 “*womöglich die tieferen Noten*”
right notes, sometimes missing the mark rather significantly, and there are four
recordings which sing the ostia notes.27

“Nacht” is not the only song that requires the prolonged use of the low register in
Pierrot. “Rote Messe,” “Enthauptung,” and “Die Kreuze” are all examples of songs that
have a significant amount of writing for the lower-middle register (C4 – C5) accompanied
by larger instrumentation at louder dynamic levels.28 These portions of the score require
a tremendous amount of low partial/“chest voice” in order to be heard and to be effective.
Sopranos usually struggle most in these portions. They frequently cannot sustain the
“chestier,” heavy mechanism necessary and therefore have to “flip” into a lighter
mechanism that utilizes more high partial, or “head voice.” This change is easily heard
on the recordings and renders these portions of the score less effective and somewhat
awkward. The listener can hear and feel the vocal discomfort of the singer, thus putting
the focus on the technique and abilities of the singer and not on the text and music.29
Singers who are more successful in these passages tend to pitch the entire section lower
so that they can stay in their chest voice, over-brighten the low register so that it better
cuts through the heavier instrumental texture, or take their chest voice all the way up to
the higher notes.30

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27 Lucy Shelton, Sophie Boulin, Edith Urbanczyk, and Ethel Semser.
28 See mm. 10-15 of “Rote Messe,” mm. 15-20 of “Enthauptung,” and mm. 1-2, 6-7, & 9 of “Die Kreuze.”
29 Phyllis Bryn-Julson, Lucy Shelton, Anne-Lise Berntsen, and Anja Silja are examples of this. These last
two singers, Berntsen and Silja, are also examples of singers whose vocal color/quality is not ideal for
Pierrot. They have extremely dark, thick, covered, diffused voices which lack the brightness and clarity
required for these songs.
30 Bethany Beardslee, Salome Kammer, and Ilona Steingruber-Wildgans are excellent examples of these
three techniques. Lucy Shelton’s recording is actually indicative of both issues. There are instances of
over-brightening the low so that it can be heard above the ensemble, and other instances in which she stays
in chest voice as long as possible, but then makes a sudden and dramatic shift into head voice to access the
higher portions.
Lastly, a few words about the role of the conductor in these pieces. As is evidenced by the small number of recordings in the discography, *Pierrot lunaire* without a conductor is certainly an accomplishment for all the musicians involved. A performance of *Pierrot* in which the musicians take responsibility for leading and guiding each other is the exception to the rule, and one that can usually only be accomplished when the performers have had the luxury of numerous rehearsals with each other. While a conductor is necessary for performances and recordings for which there have been only a few brief hours of rehearsal, the conductor removes an element of spontaneity from the process. Ensembles without a conductor may enjoy a more organic and, incidentally, frequently a better-rehearsed performance. Every member of the ensemble must be constantly listening, reacting, and responding to each other. The presence of a conductor removes a significant amount of personal responsibility from the equation, making the performance a response to what the conductor wants as opposed to what the music demands.\(^{31}\)

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\(^{31}\) Having had the privilege of performing *Pierrot lunaire* without a conductor, I can attest to the fact that it was possible, in no small part, due to the luxury of having countless hours of rehearsal, excellent coaching during the learning process, and an outstanding ensemble. The conductor-less *Pierrot* can be successful in spite of Erwin Stein’s last sentence in his chapter on *Pierrot* in his book *Orpheus in New Guises*, 89: “Above all, a conductor is needed for the reciter who, however musical, easily loses his grip on the rhythm.”
CHAPTER FOUR

Discography Overview

The *Pierrot lunaire* discography spans over sixty years beginning with Schoenberg’s Columbia recording in the fall of 1940. There are forty-six recordings listed in Wayne Shoaf’s official discography, some of which are partial recordings, recordings never released, and recordings in which the performers are unknown. Singers and actresses both have undertaken the role of the Reciter, representing every niche of the singer’s repertory: contemporary music specialists; singers of opera, jazz, oratorio, and art song; and actresses. Several singers and conductors have recorded the work more than once. Stravinsky expert, Robert Craft, recorded it in 1963 with Bethany Beardslee and in 2000 with Anja Silja. René Leibowitz, a friend and colleague of Schoenberg’s, recorded it with Ellen Adler in 1951 and with Ethel Semser in 1954. Pierre Boulez, one of the great composers and conductors of the twentieth century, has recorded the work three times spanning four decades: in 1961 with dramatic soprano Helga Pilarczyk, in 1977 with mezzo soprano Yvonne Minton, and in 1997 with German lyric soprano Christine Schäfer. Five singers have recorded *Pierrot* twice during their careers: Alice Howland, Mary Thomas, Jane Manning, Lina Åkerlund, and Phyllis Bryn-Julson.

In the next chapter, five recordings—and specifically, four songs—will be reviewed and analyzed in detail based on the criteria presented in Chapter Three. This chapter, however, is concerned with the remaining recordings in the discography: which aspects of each performance are successful and which are unsuccessful; what is the relationship between the Reciter’s rendering and Schoenberg’s intentions; and what is the
range of stylistic practices.\textsuperscript{1} Several “standard” recordings are not included in the next chapter; in part, because they are the popular recordings that are available to everyone, but also because they are rather average in most aspects of the performance criteria. The exception to this is Jan DeGaetani’s 1970 recording with Arthur Weisberg. DeGaetani’s performance is one of the most effective recordings readily available; her performance is highly communicative, exciting, and expressive without being melodramatic. DeGaetani’s execution is not always pitch-perfect (inasmuch as it is supposed to be), but she generally follows the contour of Schoenberg’s melody, and is very attentive to Schoenberg’s musical markings (articulations, dynamics, and tempi), especially in the contrast between the gesungen and gesprochen pitches. DeGaetani executes the Sprechstimme with subtle and effective gliding between the pitches; the listener is drawn in by the excellent articulation of the text without being made keenly aware of the technique used to travel between the notes. In regard to the gesungen pitches, vibrato is clearly added so that those specific pitches are purposefully set apart. It is a difficult task for a singer to remove vibrato from every phonated note, particularly in the upper register, at loud dynamic levels, and during notes of long duration. The less speech-like the vocal writing, the more difficult it is to execute it in manner akin to speech. Vibrato is occasionally present on some Sprechstimme pitches in the DeGaetani recording, but overall, her interpretation is essentially without vibrato and extremely effective. Her straight tone is never forced or breath-starved; it is free and healthy.

One of the most successful aspects of the DeGaetani recording is her controlled characterization. Her interpretation is never “over-the-top.” She faithfully follows

\textsuperscript{1} Many thanks to Eike Fess at the Arnold Schönberg Center for allowing me access to all of the recordings in the ASC archive.
Schoenberg's markings, accurately executing the score, never crossing the line into questionable interpretational territory. Exaggerated articulations and character voices are not used to portray a specific persona or state of mind; rather, she uses her voice to portray the atmosphere of the text as it is already presented in the music. DeGaetani's text declamation and delivery are superb; one can grasp the connotation of the poetry without necessarily understanding every word of the German. Meaning and expression can be understood by the sound of the interpretation alone.²

Though DeGaetani is quite faithful to the contour of the vocal line, and even delivers many of the pitches accurately, her declamation in the middle and lower registers is frequently not true to the score. In measures 12-15 of "Rote Messe," DeGaetani opts for a delivery that is all chest register. Because the orchestration is dense and loud, her choice to perform those measures with more low partial guarantees a sound that will better cut through the ensemble. Because of that choice, however, she does not accurately deliver the prescribed pitches. Her lower register pitch ambiguity continues throughout the rest of the song, following the general contour of the vocal line, but only approximating the written intervals, particularly at mm. 18-20. Other songs which have

² In fact, DeGaetani's clarity and precision of interpretation calls to mind Schoenberg's essay, "The Relationship to the Text," as published in his collection of essays, Style and Idea, pp. 141-45. In this frequently quoted essay from 1912, Schoenberg writes, "There are relatively few people who are capable of understanding, purely in terms of music, what music has to say." He continues:

A few years ago I was deeply ashamed when I discovered in several Schubert songs, well-known to me, that I had absolutely no idea what was going on in the poems on which they were based. But when I read the poems, it became clear that I had gained absolutely nothing for the understanding of the songs... On the contrary, it appeared that, without knowing the poem, I had grasped the content, the real content, perhaps even more profoundly that if I had clung to the surface of the mere thoughts expressed in words.

Schoenberg goes on to say that he had never been more faithful to the poet's intent than when he allowed himself to be guided by the sound of the verse alone. Likewise, in Jan DeGaetani's thoughtful interpretation of Pierrot lunaire, one can divine the meaning of the verse by the sound (her rendering of the vocal line) alone.
the same lower register pitch issues include no. 7, “Der kranke Mond,” no. 16, “Gemeinheit,” and no. 20, “Heimfahrt.” Pitches in the higher register are usually more accurate: the G-sharp in m. 11 of “Rote Messe”; the G-sharp and F-sharp in mm. 18 and 21, respectively, in “Madonna”; and the F-natural in m. 20 of “Enthauptung.”

Phyllis Bryn-Julson’s two recordings (with conductors Peter Eötvös in 1991 and Robert Black in 1992) are also not among the Chapter Five recordings, nor are Lucy Shelton’s popular 1990 recording, and Anja Silja’s 2000 recording (with Robert Craft, conductor). These recordings, though commercially successful and readily available, are not exceptional in either their adherence to or noncompliance with Schoenberg’s instructions. All four of these recordings have their strong points: each interpreter is relatively accurate in regard to pitch, and certainly in regard to maintaining intervallic integrity (with occasional exceptions, particularly in the high and low extremes); and the movement between the notes is generally a slide, each reserving the portamento for the few places where Schoenberg actually asks for it. Each of these recordings shows, however, that accurate pitch execution alone does not ensure a successful performance. There are several weaknesses in each performance, making these recordings less effective in spite of their relative faithfulness to the printed page.

Lucy Shelton’s interpretation is too melodramatic throughout the entire cycle. In almost every song Shelton adds vocal characterizations and articulations that are not indicated in the score. In song no. 1, “Mondestrunk,” she adds staccato and marcato articulations where they are not indicated; in song no. 8, “Nacht,” she growls through mm. 14-16 and mm. 23-25 when declaiming the words “finstre, schwarze Riesenfalter.” In fact, for almost every song, her voice takes on a new character: sick and weak in “Der
kranken Mond”; overly maudlin in “Heimweh”; coy and petulant in “Gemeinheit.” While her inflectional abilities are impressive, and the drama is not without its communicative interest, her “voices” clearly disregard Schoenberg’s explicit instructions in the Preface. Every instance in which she endeavors to paint the text more vividly by adding her own vocal characterizations, Schoenberg has already done so, by way of the text setting, instrumentation, rhythmic drive, dynamics, tempo, and expressive markings (sehr zart, trocken, belebend, and flüchtig). Schoenberg’s writing is comprehensive. Shelton’s exaggerated characterizations present a clichéd, over-acted version of Pierrot that detracts from Schoenberg’s already extensively notated score.

Likewise, Phyllis Bryn-Julson’s performances also tend towards occasional campiness, but the real shortcoming in her interpretations is in the execution of the Sprechstimme. Bryn-Julson’s interpretation is inconsistent in her use of vibrato. Her rendering of the Sprechstimme is very effective when performed non-vibrato, however she sings with substantial vibrato in numerous passages which are not marked as gesungen, thereby making it difficult to distinguish between notes which are gesprochen and those which are gesungen. Her vibrato also affects the technique of moving between the pitches. When vibrato is absent, she glides between the pitches; vibrato in her tone, however, makes for a pronounced portamento, often in passages for which it is not indicated. The overall effect is one of inconsistency as she vacillates between vibrato and straight tone, portamento and sliding.

Another unique and slightly distracting practice is Bryn-Julson’s tendency to scoop into accented syllables. She is, in fact, falling prey to the very practice Stein admonished in his chapter from Orpheus in New Guises: she is using the upward glide
(raising the voice within a syllable) much more frequently than indicated or than is common. The end product is affected, contrived, and somewhat sing-songy—exactly what Schoenberg cautioned against.\(^3\)

Anja Silja’s recording is a prime example of a once great dramatic soprano who has added *Pierrot*, among other lower roles, to her repertoire in the later years of her career. Silja made her mark on the operatic stage in the sixties and seventies, singing all the major roles in the dramatic soprano *fach*: The Woman in *Erwartung*, Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*, as well as numerous other Wagner roles (Isolde, Elisabeth, Venus, Elsa, Freia, and Brünnhilde) and the title roles in Berg’s *Lulu* and Strauss’ *Elektra* and *Salome*. Within the last fifteen years, however, she has taken on lower roles: Herodias in *Salome*, *Pierrot lunaire*, Countess Geschwitz in *Lulu*, as well as Klytämnestra in *Elektra*. Though she had a formidable, ringing upper register at the height of her career, she now, at the age of seventy, has experienced some expected vocal decline. Recorded in 2000, her *Pierrot* performance highlights some vocal difficulties: her upper register lacks strength, the middle register is slightly fuzzy and husky, and there is a significantly wide vibrato throughout. Silja’s recording brings to the forefront how important vocal timbre is to a successful rendering of *Pierrot lunaire*. It requires an agile and flexible voice, not necessarily the agility required for *bel canto fioratura*, but rather a lithe instrument which has endless color and weight possibilities. Due in no small part to Silja’s age, she no longer has those possibilities at her disposal. Her *Pierrot* lacks a brilliance and pointedness of tone that is crucial to an effective performance. Her vibrato is very

\(^3\) All of these characteristics—scooping, vibrato, *portamento*—are present in Bryn-Julson’s recording of “Die Kreuze” with Peter Eötvös.
present, even overwhelming at times, and the vocal line is quite sung. *Pierrot* requires a silvery tone that is bright, resonant, and focused, qualities which Silja no longer displays.

**Remaining Recordings**

Of the remaining recordings in the discography, several are worthy of mention. A 1997 recording with Luisa Castellani and Giuseppe Sinopoli is particularly interesting. Castellani’s declamation is good: she subtly glides between pitches, and the *gesungen* pitches are accurate; however, longer note values frequently have a significant amount of vibrato, and she occasionally does not follow the contour of Schoenberg’s melody. The most intriguing aspect of the recording, however, is the balance between the Speaker and the ensemble. The instruments consistently overpower the voice. Not unlike Schoenberg’s recording (which had its limitation due to the sound recording’s early technology) in which Stiedry-Wagner’s vocal line is almost inaudible due to balance issues, Castellani seems to be of background importance only. In Sinopoli’s recording, the instrumental forces are of primary importance, while the voice takes on a secondary role.

Another recording that has balance issues is Patricia Rideout’s 1974 recording. This is also one of the few recordings (albeit a partial one) that does not have a conductor; however, the pianist for the recording, Glenn Gould, is clearly dictating tempi and other musical aspects of the pieces. Recorded for CBC Studios in Toronto (with whom Gould worked on numerous occasions), the balance is clearly skewed towards the piano and other instruments. Not only is the piano generally louder than any other instrument, it occasionally drowns out the singer, as well. In regard to tempo, this
recording is also exceptional. At least five of the seven songs on this recording have tempi that are well below the printed markings. Song no. 1, “Mondesrunkens,” for example, is marked Bewegt, with the \( \dot{\downarrow} \) = ca. 66-76. The Rideout/Gould recording is a slightly lethargic \( \dot{\downarrow} \) = 58. Song nos. 2 and 5, “Columbine” and “Valse de Chopin,” respectively, have even more drastic tempo errors. Both have a time signature of \( \frac{3}{4} \), with the dotted half note (the full measure) as the beat. “Columbine” has a metronome marking of the \( \dot{\downarrow} \) = 42-48; “Valse de Chopin” is marked \( \dot{\downarrow} \) = 46-50 (Schoenberg calls it a Langsamer Walzer). This recording has the \( \dot{\downarrow} \) = 80 in both songs—a tempo that is almost half of what it should be. These tempi emphasize the earlier point (Chapter One) in which tempo was described as a crucial element to the success of the Sprechstimme. The tempi are often so slow that the Sprechstimme feels and sounds tedious and wearisome. Tempo fluctuations are also more pronounced in Gould’s recording. There are performed ritardandi and fermati that are not marked in the score, as well as a highly romantic sense of rubato in much of the phrasing—a stylistic characteristic which might be appropriate in “Valse de Chopin,” but which, unfortunately, occurs in all the wrong places.\(^4\)

In regard to Rideout’s Sprechstimme, it is difficult to say how many of the problems are merely a by-product of bad tempi and the like; nevertheless, there are several elements of her presentation which make this recording less than ideal. First, though she does attempt to follow the contour of the vocal line, she tends to pitch everything quite high. While this is to be expected to a certain degree (Stein, for one,

\(^4\) For examples of this, listen to song no. 2, mm. 20-21; and song no. 3, mm. 25-26.
indicates that the Reciter is free to transpose the vocal line to fit her type of voice⁵), when pitched too high, the inherent and intended quality of the work is entirely lost.

Rideout’s movement between the notes vacillates between sliding and *portamento*. Her use of *portamento*, particularly in the high register and at loud dynamics, is extremely intrusive and disruptive to the line and character of the songs. In connection with the overused *portamento*, those same sections have too much vibrato in them and therefore sound sung, not spoken. Patricia Rideout’s recording also demonstrates some of the worst German diction in the discography. Some words are completely wrong in that she reverses letters within words (no. 6, “Madonna, m. 5. She sings the word *magren* instead of *magnern*), and other words are just horribly mispronounced; she almost always accents the unaccented –*er* endings of words: *nieder*, *Dichter*, *Wunder*, *bronzen*, *blasser*, *Mutter*, to name a few. Though there are quality moments within this performance, the negative aspects far outweigh the positive.

Most of the recordings can be easily placed into two groups: those which *portamento* between notes and those which slide/glide. Directly connected to both of these issues then is also the distinction between the Reciters who use vibrato on the *Sprechstimme* pitches and those who do not. Of particular note in the *portamento* category are the recordings of Bethany Beardslee/Robert Craft (1963), and the two recordings of Alice Howland with Arthur Winograd (1955) and Herbert Zipper (1962). A few of the more effective recordings in the sliding category are Ellen Adler/René Leibowitz (1951); Gerda Hartman/no conductor (1987); Maria Höglind/Jan Risberg (1991); and Salome Kammer/Hans Zender (1994). And then there are those—like the Phyllis Bryn-Julson/Peter Eötvös recording—which seem to haphazardly combine the

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two: Sophie Boulin/Paul Méfano (1996); Mary Thomas/David Atherton (1973); Karin Ott/Pietro Antonini (1990-94); and both of Jane Manning’s recordings with Simon Rattle (1977) and Karl Aage Rasmussen (1983).

Several of these recordings are worthy of note for other characteristics. For example, Gerda Hartman’s recording makes good use of range and register, glides subtly between notes, makes an excellent attempt at the written pitches and certainly follows the contour; however, though most of her Sprechstimme is without vibrato (in an unforced manner), the gesungen portions also have absolutely no vibrato. She calls attention to these passages by singing them louder and straighter than the pitches on either side.6

Mary Thomas’ 1973 recording with conductor David Atherton sounds like a precursor to Lucy Shelton’s recording seventeen years later. The quality of voice is very similar, as are many of the articulations and characterizations that one hears in the later Shelton recording. Unlike Shelton, however, there is a tremendous amount of overdone vibrato and the portamento that ensues sounds almost ghost-like. Her performance borders on the absurd due to the exaggerated shivering between pitches.7 Her characterizations cross the line into the outlandish, fanatical, and grotesque; she distorts Schoenberg’s intentions and desires (as expressed in the Preface) in regard to these songs.

6 In Jane Manning’s article of Pierrot reminiscences (“A Sixties ‘Pierrot’: A Personal Memoir,” Tempo 59 (July 2005): 21), she makes a point of discussing the difference between the gesungen and gesprochen pitches. She says, “... the special fragments marked ‘gesungen’ have to be clearly differentiated from the Sprechgesang. It seems advisable to sing them in a clear, quasi non-vibrato tone so there can be no mistake.” This interpretation is very bizarre, indeed, as it suggests then that every other tone in the work is to be performed with vibrato. And yet, throughout the rest of her article, she acknowledges that this is not to be the case (except for “some of the more impassioned and violent sections”—p. 18). Her article is replete with contradictions. Elsewhere in the article she states, “It remains my firm belief that the expressive impact of this music does not depend on external theatrics, but comes from a scrupulous adherence to the minutiae of the score.” (p. 22-23). However, on page 18 she remarks that she “made a rough chart of moods, characters, timbres, and possible small hand gestures...”; and again on pp. 24-25, she recalls the first time she performed it from memory in a “staged” performance, with Pierrot costume, and white make-up. These practices seem to go against her belief that the music “does not depend on external theatrics.”

7 Alice Howland also renders the Sprechstimme in much the same way.
Each song has a different “voice”—crazy, coy, anxious, fanatical, psychotic, paranoid. The narrator in several songs sounds certifiably mentally ill, and perhaps this is the intended effect. While her ability to produce a different sound and voice for every song is impressive, the overall effect is far from successful. Recalling Schoenberg’s letter to Fritz and Erika Stiedry just before their 1940 recording sessions, Schoenberg expressed that he thought it was important that they strive to perfectly catch “that light, ironical, satirical tone in which the piece was actually conceived.”\textsuperscript{8} Mary Thomas’ interpretation is more closely aligned with an Erwartung-like hysteria or psychosis and less so with irony and satire.

The recordings of Ellen Adler and Jeanne Héricard represent the more spoken end of the spectrum. These are very effective recordings in that the performances seem to be without pretense; they are honest and simple. Pitches are occasionally wrong and the contour is not always correct, but they are extremely accessible. There is no affectation in these interpretations; they have a better chance of being understood because they are without bravado, and simply put, they are easier to listen to. The downside to the more spoken delivery is that without the extremes of range being presented, the interpretation often becomes one-dimensional and monochromatic.

Of the numerous recordings that tend to be more sung, one characteristic is common throughout: they generally are not as interesting. It is not the pitches themselves that are interesting; it is what happens in between the pitches that makes this piece so wonderful. It is the controversy surrounding the “how” and “why” of Sprechstimme that continues to make this piece as interesting today as it was ninety years ago. Removing the Sprechstimme—and that is essentially what a performer is doing when she chooses to

\textsuperscript{8} Rufer, 40.
sing every pitch—changes the piece. It is no longer a faithful representation of the work that Schoenberg composed. The performers who tend towards a more sung rendering—Ing-Britt Ibba Anderssen, Edith Urbanczyk, and Leslie Boucher, among others—give a very genteel, respectable, and thoroughly unoriginal interpretation.

French soprano Sophie Boulin has recorded one of the more atypical versions of Pierrot. Her rendering of the vocal line fits into almost every category of performance criteria. It is frequently too sung, and yet there are just as many occasions where there is no singing at all, only yelling. She often has little concern for the health of her voice; she yells, growls, barks, snarls, and shrieks. For example, “Rote Messe,” “Enthauptung,” and “Gemeinheit” (Song nos. 11, 13, and 16, respectively) are angry, abusive, rough, and aggressive. She yells large portions of these songs, uses more heavy mechanism and carries chest voice higher than almost any other singer. “Die Kreuze,” “Heimweh,” and “Parodie” (Song nos. 14, 15, and 17, respectively), by comparison, sound like operatic arias: voluminous amounts of vibrato; a more agile, silvery tone; and much more use of head voice and a more legitimate singing tone.

Boulin’s characterizations are bold, but not necessarily inappropriately so; that is, one does not feel like a totally different person is being presented in every song. Boulin instead seems to present twenty-one facets of one personality. It is her complete and total abandon and lack of inhibition with which she performs this piece that makes it an incredibly intriguing, compelling, and convincing performance. It is not always well put together: not all the right notes happen at the right time, and there is the touch of the overly theatrical about it, but she has a connection to the text that is honest, committed, and unapologetic.
Though not every recording has been specifically discussed in this chapter, the goal has been to introduce the reader to the wide variance in performance practice of *Sprechstimme* as represented in the *Pierrot lunaire* discography. No two recordings are alike, and while there are certainly similar characteristics between performers' interpretations, there is not an agreed upon standard of *Sprechstimme* delivery. Much continues to be left to the discretion of the interpreter. With every new recording that is released, the range of criteria will likely continue to expand, confirming that there are still more ways to interpret the score and technically execute the *Sprechstimme*.
CHAPTER FIVE

Five Unique Pierrots

To better understand the previously discussed stylistic traits and techniques involved in the performance of *Sprechstimme*, a detailed comparison and contrast of four songs from five specific recordings will be presented in this chapter. These recordings were chosen, in part, to display the gamut of possible interpretations, but also because they span a significant number of years (fifty-seven) and come from five very different performers. The five recordings are:

- Erika Stiedry-Wagner, Reciter; Arnold Schoenberg, Conductor. Columbia Records; Los Angeles, California; 1940.
- Christine Schäfer, Reciter; Pierre Boulez, Conductor. Deutsche Grammophon; Paris, France; 1997.
- Barbara Sukowa, Reciter; Reinbert de Leeuw, Conductor. Koch Schwann; Utrecht, Holland; 1989.¹

After a brief history of each singer, followed by an overview of the general stylistic traits as demonstrated on each recording, the five recordings will be reviewed and analyzed in detail based on comparing and contrasting three specific songs from each: “Rote Messe,” “Die Kreuze,” and “Parodie,” as well as a brief mention of “O alter Duft.”

¹ Complete bibliographical information, including which specific release was used for this document, can be found in Appendix A.
It is likely that almost every woman (and conductor) who has studied *Pierrot lunaire* has at least cursorily reviewed Schoenberg’s recording with Stiedry-Wagner.\(^2\)

We frequently turn to the composer’s recording in hopes of discovering hidden clues as to how the piece is to be performed. Schoenberg’s recording is also, naturally, the original yardstick against which subsequent recordings and performances are measured.

The second through fourth recordings represent, in my estimation, the *Pierrot lunaire* version of “The Three Little Bears”: one which is very spoken (Helga Pilarczyk); one which is very sung (Yvonne Minton); and one which is “just right” (Christine Schäfer). These three recordings are all with the same conductor, Pierre Boulez, and span four decades of his career.

The final recording with Barbara Sukowa is not unlike the Sophie Boulin performance discussed in Chapter Four. There is nothing traditional or cautious about this recording; it is one of the most audacious recordings available. Sukowa, a well-known German actress of stage and film, now performs several concert works, including the *Gurre-Lieder* and *Pierrot lunaire*. Though *Pierrot* has primarily been the domain of singers for the last fifty years, Sukowa’s dramatic performance is oddly refreshing and

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\(^2\) A partial recording of *Pierrot lunaire* with Schoenberg conducting was recently discovered by Professor Avior Byron (Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan, Israel and Royal Holloway, University of London). It was found in the Rodgers & Hammerstein Archive of Recorded Sound in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The incomplete performance took place in the New York Town Hall on November 17, 1940, and was sponsored by the New Friends of Music. The concert was then radio broadcast in New York. The Reciter for this broadcast was Erika Stiedry-Wagner. Though the balance between the Reciter and ensemble is much better in this newly discovered recording, the *Sprechstimme* issues at question in this document are essentially the same between the Columbia Records full recording and this partially performed *Pierrot* for radio broadcast. Professor Byron is in the process of examining this recording more closely; his findings on this recording and other Schoenberg-conducted recordings of *Pierrot lunaire*, *Verklärte Nacht*, and the *Suite for Seven Instruments*, Op. 29, will be part of his forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation, “Schoenberg as Performer: an Aesthetic in Practice.”
manages to capture the theatrical atmosphere that is already present within the score.\(^3\) Though it may be considered over-the-top at times, it is always exciting, refreshing, immediately engaging, as well as entertaining.

Helga Pilarczyk, Yvonne Minton, and Christine Schäfer have had significant careers in opera, concert, and recital. German dramatic soprano Helga Pilarczyk is perhaps best known for her performances in modern opera, including Berg’s *Lulu* and *Wozzeck*, Strauss’ *Salome*, and Schoenberg’s *Erwartung*. Australian mezzo soprano Yvonne Minton has had a long and diverse career, singing for several seasons at Covent Garden, as well as guest appearances at major opera houses around the world. Her repertory includes Oktavian in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Sextus in *La Clemenza di Tito*, as well as roles in *Die Walküre*, *Parsifal*, and *Lohengrin*. Her concert appearances include Verdi’s *Requiem*, Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde*, and Elgar’s *Sea Pictures*. German soprano Christine Schäfer has built a solid reputation on the concert and opera stage. Opera roles include Mozart’s Konstanze, Pamina, and Cherubino; Strauss’ *Zerbinetta*, as well as Berg’s *Lulu*. Her concert repertoire is diverse and includes performances of Bach, Mozart, Boulez, and Schoenberg.

These four women, in addition to Stiedry-Wagner, represent a wide spectrum of musical backgrounds, professional experiences, as well as a tremendous generational gap. Spanning almost sixty years, their interpretations are vastly different, each with its own merit. Much can be divined about Schoenberg’s work as a whole through these recordings, as well as the evolution of performance practice of *Sprechstimme*.

\(^3\) Barbara Sukowa was born in Germany, now lives in New York, and continues to make a living by performing on the German stage, in German and American movies, and in a very select repertoire of concert work: *Gurre-Lieder*, *Pierrot lunaire*, and Weill’s *Dreigroschenoper*. 
Stylistic Overview of the Recordings

Schoenberg expressed his satisfaction with his own recording, specifically in regard to the instrumentalists and musical elements such as tempo, phrasing, expression, and balance within the instrumental ensemble. His recording is an excellent example of how well the individual songs work when performed at the correct tempo.\(^4\) Schoenberg’s tempo markings are extremely precise, and when disregarded, it not only drastically affects the flow of the ensemble, but also the efficacy of the \textit{Sprechstimme}, as mentioned previously. One might conclude from Schoenberg’s 1940 letter to the Stiedrys that the \textit{Pierrot} interpretations in the intervening years may have strayed from Schoenberg’s original intent.\(^5\) It is, therefore, with this recording that Schoenberg hoped to return to the original character and atmosphere in which the work was conceived.

Stiedry-Wagner’s rendering of the \textit{Sprechstimme} is admirable, and though not pitch-perfect, she is generally faithful in following the rise and fall of the line, and the \textit{gesungen} pitches are also relatively accurate. Again, for a woman whose primary training was in the theater, this was an extraordinary accomplishment. With the exception of an occasional flutter or tremolo in her voice (as would not be unusual for someone without much vocal training), she does make every attempt to glide from note to note. The occasional misplaced \textit{portamento} is present in those passages where she has difficulty controlling the tremolo in her voice, usually occurring on the longer held notes. Her text declamation is very speech-like, not overly affected (an excellent point of emulation for other interpreters), and the \textit{gesungen} pitches have vibrato making them generally discernable from the \textit{gesprochen} pitches. It is a credible interpretation, and

\(^4\) Some of the songs are, in fact, slightly faster than indicated in the score. “Madonna” is slightly faster, as is “Parodie.”

\(^5\) See Chapter One, footnote 23.
while some may be tempted to dismiss it based on cosmetic reasons (recording quality, unrefined vocalism, and balance), much can be learned from it; Stiedry-Wagner was Schoenberg’s endorsed Reciter, mistakes and all. Though he knew there were elements which needed to be addressed in the recitation, this recording is still one of the only primary sources available to us.

Helga Pilarczyk’s recording from 1961 with Pierre Boulez is one of the most spoken recordings in the discography. Part of what makes this performance sound exceptionally spoken is her infrequent use of head voice. She maintains a very low, speaking-range tessitura for the entire performance. Because of this, one never hears the extremes of range that Schoenberg’s notation calls for. She rarely ventures out of her chest voice, and while it does lend an exceptionally speech-like quality to the songs, it is the extremes of *Pierrot* that makes the vocal line so exciting. Frequent *Pierrot* interpreter Jane Manning recalls speaking with Pilarczyk about this work. Manning says that Pilarczyk was “forthright in her assertion that it was ‘quite impossible’ at the written tessitura, and that one should simply pitch it much lower.”6 Though Stein said that every performer should pitch the *Sprechstimme* according to the individual’s spoken voice, Schoenberg must have had something slightly more advanced in mind. Clearly no one’s speaking voice encompasses a range of two and a half octaves; therefore it is only natural to assume that the performer must venture outside her natural speaking range. It is this precise practice that makes the rendering of these texts so exciting—the performer is attempting to keep a speech-like quality in areas of the voice where one does not generally speak. Pilarczyk’s vocal delivery rarely goes above C₅—and usually stays

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6 Manning, 20. It is peculiar that Pilarczyk would have thought so; she was, after all, a great dramatic soprano, who, during the apex of her career, easily had all *Pierrot* pitches (and more) at her disposal.
between $A_3$ and $A_4$—even though the vocal line is written much higher. Regardless of the very limited range, there are several successes on the recording. Her delivery is so much like speech (because of the range) that one is rarely aware of the *Sprechstimme* as a vocal technique. It truly sounds like speech, but not even incredibly “heightened.” To her credit, because it is so speech-like, the *gesungen* pitches are quite obvious. In fact, the line of demarcation between speaking and singing is perhaps more pronounced on Pilarczyk’s recording than on any other.

An oddity about the recording that seems to be related to the low tessitura is her tendency to shorten the vowel (and duration of the note) by closing to the next consonant, thus cutting short the slide and written duration of the pitch, as well as anticipating the next syllable or word. This happens more frequently when the following consonant is /l/, /m/, /n/, or a trilled /r/.\(^7\) Because her delivery is so speech-like, it lacks some of the more pronounced sliding as heard on other recordings. This is due, in no small part, to the fact that because the pitch range of the performance has been narrowed significantly, she often does not have as great a distance to travel between notes. Jeanne Héricard’s 1957 recording with Hans Rosbaud is the only other recording which demonstrates, to this extent, this same vocal aberration of shortening the rhythmic duration and the vowel by closing to the next consonant. (Héricard’s recording is also the only other performance that is as spoken as Pilarczyk’s.)

A published conversation between Boulez and Theodor Adorno in 1966 addresses, among other things, Pilarczyk’s extremely spoken recitation. Adorno brought to Boulez’s attention that Pilarczyk’s realization is much more spoken than even Stiedry-Wagner’s in Schoenberg’s recording; how did he reconcile this? Boulez explained:

\(^7\) Stein warned against this exact practice in *Orpheus in New Guises*, 88.
... *Sprechstimme* is, so to speak, an impure medium... in the sense that it violates a purely musical will... Webern never utilized *Sprechstimme* in his works, because it injured the purity of the music.8

Adorno explained that the intended goal of the *Sprechstimme* should be one of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). The foreignness of the music should be intensified by the addition of this thoroughly foreign, unnatural, and alienating vocal technique. Adorno commented that Boulez held himself more strictly to the spoken nature of the delivery with Frau Pilarczyk than Schoenberg himself had.9 Boulez agreed, at which point Adorno suggested he was "more papal than the pope" in this respect. Boulez remarked that he thought that Frau Pilarczyk had performed the *Sprechstimme* wonderfully.10

Yvonne Minton's recording from 1977 marks a complete turn-around in the interpretation of *Pierrot* for the Boulez discography. Impressive in her pitch accuracy, Minton's rendering is almost completely sung, occasionally with straight tone but often with vibrato. There appears to be no predetermined plan as to when she performs the *Sprechstimme* with or without vibrato. In general, notes that are higher in pitch and longer in duration tend to have vibrato, but there are plenty of examples of writing for the lower register in which she also uses vibrato (no. 11, "Rote Messe"). Likewise, she minimizes her use of vibrato in songs such as no. 4, "Eine blasse Wäscherin," and no. 6, "Madonna." Regardless of the presence or absence of vibrato, Minton does not slide between the pitches, nor does she insert *portamenti* in places where they are not called

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8 Adorno and Boulez, 85.
9 Ibid. Boulez agreed with Adorno and it was at this point in the conversation that Boulez told the anecdote (as told to him by Leonard Stein) of Schoenberg's demonstration of the *Sprechstimme* in *Ode to Napoleon* and how it was at complete odds with how it was actually notated (as previously cited in Chapter One, footnote 45).
10 Ibid., 86.
for. She sings the songs as though they were any other piece of Lieder. Though there are other recordings that at first hearing sound more sung (because of a more present vibrato), Minton’s performance is actually more pitch accurate. Because her vibrato is generally very free and natural, and not overdone, it is much easier to aurally discern individual pitches. It is one of the “cleanest” recordings available, and if one wants to hear the relationship between the instrumental ensemble and the written pitches as sung, there is no better recording. It is not, however, what Schoenberg intended. This also seems an odd interpretation for Boulez to endorse considering his earlier words in favor of Pīlarczyk’s interpretation.

Although this is not an “accurate” performance of Sprechstimme, Minton’s interpretation is still extremely effective. Because of the self-imposed limitations inherent in the more sung interpretation, there is less risk for exaggerated characterization and over-acting. Her performance is not boring or uninteresting in the least; this is evidence, perhaps, of the genius of the writing. Even though the vocal line is not performed according to Schoenberg’s instructions (and, in fact, in exact opposition to what he wished), Minton nonetheless delivers an effective performance.

Boulez’s final recording of Pierrot, with German soprano Christine Schäfer, offers a more balanced performance than either of his previous Pierrot recordings. Recorded in 1997—twenty years after the Minton recording—Schäfer’s Speaker shows a depth of understanding of the music, text, and Sprechstimme that is not present in almost any other recording.11 The instrumental ensemble in this recording, the Ensemble InterContemporain, is also exceptional. As is true of most Boulez performances, the

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11 As mentioned in Chapter Four, Jan DeGaetani’s recording is also extremely effective. While Schäfer’s rendering of the Sprechstimme is, perhaps, more “textbook” accurate, DeGaetani’s performance is equal to, if not better than, Schäfer’s in every other respect.
caliber of players is unparalleled; the outstanding ensemble, coupled with Schäfer’s performance, makes this one of the most consistent, accurate, and engaging recordings available.

Schäfer’s Sprechstimme is very clean. Her pitch is quite accurate; that is, every pitch is clear and precise at its onset, but she then immediately abandons the original note by subtly sliding away from it. There are passages where her pitch is not perfect (that is, she is not performing the exact pitches written), but even in those few places, she maintains the intervalllic integrity so that the contour of Schoenberg’s line is well-preserved. Schäfer’s technique of moving between the pitches is outstanding; again, the focus remains on the text and the music, not on the technique. Even in places where the pitch does not trail off as it should (and those places are few), her delivery still does not give the impression of singing.

Portamento is used only in those places where it is expressly called for in the score, and there is never an overly theatrical delivery of the text. While there are a few brief moments when Schäfer allows her vibrato to be present, the vast majority of the notes—high and low alike—do not have vibrato. This shows an incredible amount of control and makes the Sprechstimme, as well as the gesungen notes, all the more effective. It is the consistency of her interpretation that makes this performance so successful and listener-friendly.

If there are negative aspects to this recording, it is that her interpretation is occasionally a little too “safe.” Some of that caution is likely a result of her need to protect herself vocally. This cycle is demanding vocally, particularly if one performs the Sprechstimme accurately and without vibrato. The purposeful withholding of vibrato can
be incredibly taxing in a work of this intensity, particularly in the high register. Schäfer is also protective of her voice in the lower-middle register, particularly in "Die Kreuze," and the middle portion of "Rote Messe." She occasionally pitches entire sections higher than written to avoid "overloading" the lower-middle register of the voice. In places where that alteration would drastically change the character of the piece (for example, in "Die Kreuze"), she compensates for it by using a "headier" tone; the resulting effect is a carefully-placed, sensible tone in which vocal—and similarly, emotional—risk is minimized. The problem with this vocal conservativism is that it drastically changes the character and atmosphere of the piece. "Die Kreuze" should not sound careful or vocally apprehensive; it should be intrepid, forthright, and self-assured. Schäfer's recording is outstanding in almost every regard. These minor shortcomings are not disparaging of Schäfer's vocal ability or her performance of this work; they are the result of the unavoidable registrational issues inherent in the differences between the soprano and mezzo soprano instrument.

Lastly, Barbara Sukowa's 1988 recording is unlike any other in the discography. It is the most visceral, magnetic, exciting, emotionally rousing, vocally abusive recording of Pierrot ever produced. By m. 29 of the first song, one is struck by the probability that this performer simply cannot be a classically-trained singer. There is no apparent concern for vocal health or preservation; the abandon with which every note is executed is incongruously appealing and stimulating, even to the well-schooled singer.

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12 When a singer is "overloading" a particular area of the voice, it generally means that one is adding too much weight (usually low partial or "chest" voice) to the sound. A "headier" tone refers to the use of more high than low partial. Schäfer uses a sound that has more "head" resonance (i.e., a lighter mechanism in which the high partials are emphasized) than "chest" resonance (i.e., a heavier mechanism in which the low partials are emphasized).
The range of vocal abuses is startling: howling, barking, screaming, growling, and shouting. She does not seem to have any regard for registration; there is no careful planning of when to use head voice, chest voice, or a mix of the two. She uses whatever sound will be most effective to vividly and truthfully depict the text. In the midst of these abuses, however, she is also capable of the most gentle, supple, sensuous tones. Her rendering of “Eine blasse Wäscherin” is erotic, sensual, and full of yearning. Conversely, “Die Kreuze” is angry, accusatory, and gruesome in the beginning, but immediately resigned and desperate at the third stanza: “Tot das Haupt—erstarrt die Locken—Fern, verweht der Lärm des Pöbels. Langsam sinkt die Sonne nieder, Eine rote Königskrone.”

Sukowa’s interpretation is perhaps not quite aligned with what Schoenberg intended; however, she does follow the contour of the vocal line and the gesungen pitches are generally accurate. Sukowa uses every possible extreme of her voice, singing much higher, lower, louder, softer, sweeter, and bawdier than any other recording available.

The Songs

Choosing only a few songs to compare and contrast is an almost impossible task. Every song has interesting aspects, however, the same song on each recording does not always demonstrate the performer’s uniqueness. For example, Sukowa’s recording of “Eine blasse Wäscherin” is one of the most beautiful in all the discography. The remaining recordings, however, present a relatively generic performance of the same song, therefore, it is not the best song for comparison. The goal was to choose songs

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13 “Dead, the head—stiffen the curled locks—Far away blows the noise of the mob. Slowly, the sun sinks, A red king’s crown.”

14 Though she does follow the contour of the line, strict intervallic integrity is not maintained. If one goes according to Stein’s suggestions, however—that is, a major third needs to be larger than a minor third, etc.—she does so accordingly.
which have five very different, very distinct interpretations. "Rote Messe," "Die Kreuze," and "Parodie" were chosen for several reasons. First, all three songs have been cited in various places in this document for their specific challenges or techniques: "Rote Messe" for its use of the notated portamento, as well as the lower register issues; "Die Kreuze" for the balance and registration problems between the voice and piano; and "Parodie" for its highly imitative writing between the instruments and the voice.  

"O alter Duft" will be briefly discussed for its tonal implications and the close relationship between the voice and piano. Second, these songs show qualities that are particularly characteristic of each performer. Third, these songs are representative of the wide vocal range required for their performance, and also present several different styles of vocal and instrumental writing.

It is not possible to address every nuance of every note of all four songs, therefore they will not necessarily be dealt with in their entirety; rather the most exceptional passages among them will be discussed. All four songs can, however, be found in their entirety in Appendix D, and their translations in Appendix C.

The discussion of these four songs will primarily be limited to the Sprechstimme and other issues as directly related to the vocal line. Nevertheless, several aspects of the vocal delivery are influenced, in no small part, by what happens in the instrumental ensemble and at the podium. There are obvious and disturbing balance issues in the Schoenberg/Stiedry-Wagner recording; Stiedry-Wagner knew it, Schoenberg acknowledged it, and we are certainly aware of it. Fortunately, in modern recordings,

\footnote{15 "Rote Messe": see Chapter One, p.21, and Chapter Three, pp. 52, 59; "Die Kreuze": Chapter Three, p. 59; and "Parodie": Chapter One, pp. 27-28.  
16 For example, "Die Kreuze" shows Pilarczyk's tendency to shorten the vowel and close to the next consonant; it also shows the challenges inherent to a soprano versus a mezzo soprano.}
most balance issues are “fixed” in the recording studio during editing. Therefore regardless of which recording is being examined, our task is to listen past the problems of the façade (this includes balance and even some ensemble coordination issues) and examine what the vocal line does: how is the *Sprechstimme* executed; what is successful in each performer’s rendering of the vocal line, and just as importantly, what is not; and perhaps most important of all, what is particularly unique to each vocalist’s interpretation as evidenced in these songs.

“Rote Messe”

Aside from the delivery of the *Sprechstimme*, of the five recordings, Schoenberg’s is the least refined and polished. As previously mentioned, balance between the voice and the ensemble presents a serious problem. Because of this, any nuance in interpretation is virtually non-existent. Nevertheless, Schoenberg’s recording with Stiedry-Wagner offers the unique perspective of how Schoenberg may have envisioned the *Sprechstimme*, a feature which no other recording can claim.

The first five measures of “Rote Messe” are delivered in very much the same way in all five recordings. The vocal range in these measures is quite low (the majority of it lies below the staff), and so there is little variation between the recordings. This is interesting in and of itself because otherwise, these are five very different interpretations. While Pilarczyk’s recording is, in general, the most spoken of the five, Sukowa and Schäfer are actually the most speech-like at the beginning of “Rote Messe” (though Schäfer pitches it slightly higher). That is, Schäfer’s inflection and Sukowa’s rhythm are most like speech. Of course, Schoenberg was adamant that the rhythm should be
followed precisely with no more liberties taken than one would in any other piece of music. Sukowa’s rhythmic liberties are not excessive; she molds the line to better fit her speech patterns.

The most interesting material occurs in mm. 10-15. There is an immediate change in character and dynamics, as well as vocal register, at m. 10. The voice is now in the upper register, and there is a *molto ritardando* at m. 11, followed by one of the two notated *portamenti* in the cycle (mm. 11-12). Written at *fff*, at the broadest point of the *ritardando*, and on the word *zerreiβt* (“he tears his priestly garments”), the *portamento* should be the climax of the song. Only in Sukowa’s recording, however, is the full drama realized, due not only to her vocal delivery but also because of the *molto ritardando* in the measure before. The brutality of the word *zerreiβt* is not felt to the degree necessary if the *ritardando* is not substantial. There is a hostility in her voice that depicts the violence of the priest ripping and tearing the vestments from his body. Vocally abusive as it may be, the visceral connection that the listener experiences during these measures cannot be denied.

Pilarczyk’s rendering of the same measures is, in comparison, rather anti-climactic because of the lack of register extremes. Notated in the score as G-sharp₅ descending to D₄, Pilarczyk somewhat matter-of-factly performs these notes as an octave descent from B₄ to B₃. Her arrival on the syllable *-reιβt* is less than remarkable. Another problem in these measures—as is encountered throughout her recording—is her shortening of vowels in anticipation of the next consonant. She does this on the word *Hand* in m. 10, as well as shortening the duration of the first syllable of *gottgeweihte* in
m. 11. This not only actually changes the rhythm of the line, but it also truncates it in such a way that the intended build-up is completely lost.

These same measures in the recordings of Stiedry-Wagner, Schäfer, and Minton are unremarkable. They are relatively well-executed, to be sure (especially Schäfer and Minton), but none emphasizes the *ritardando* to the extent necessary. This, in conjunction with their laudable pitch accuracy (or at least register), and their lack of a substantial *portamento*, renders this word somewhat too refined and anti-climactic.

Continuing on in “Rote Messe,” Pilarczyk’s performance delivers two of its most commendable qualities. Because of the spoken character of her *Sprechstimme*, as well as the strength in her low register, she easily projects over the ensemble in mm. 12-15. As has been discussed in regard to several other performers—including Schäfer—this is a rarity. Though Pilarczyk seldom performs the pitches as notated, she follows the contour remarkably well and maintains some semblance of intervallic integrity. In general, when the vocal line, as written, goes higher than A₄ (and continues to ascend), Pilarczyk will transpose the rest of the line down. For example, in mm. 14-15, Pilarczyk transposes the phrase, “Zu grausen Abendmahle,” down approximately a major ₂nd. Likewise, in m. 25, her *gesungen* pitches are beautifully sung, only down a minor ₃rd!

Incidentally, Stiedry-Wagner’s *gesungen* pitches are also too low but are the correct intervals. Minton and Schäfer, of course, sing the correct pitches in m. 25, though Minton chooses to perform these *gesungen* pitches with absolutely no vibrato. She uses vibrato through the majority of the rest of the song, but then sings with straight tone on the only three *gesungen* pitches in this song. It is this inconsistency that makes it difficult to distinguish between *Sprechstimme* and non-*Sprechstimme* passages. Were she to
consistently vibrate on every note in the song and then remove the vibrato on the *gesungen* pitches, one would likely think that was an aesthetic choice, odd, to be sure, but it would at least be consistent.

Sukowa's rendering of these *gesungen* pitches is perhaps most surprising among the five recordings; they are completely accurate, albeit without vibrato.

One final item of interest concerning m. 16 of "Rote Messe" is Schoenberg's dynamic markings on the first two syllables. He meticulously marks these syllables as *ff* followed by a *subito pp* on the words "beim Blendeglanz." With the exception of Schäfer, there is almost no dynamic contrast in any of the other recordings. There is, however, incredible registrational contrast in Sukowa's recording. The pitches in the score are C₅ on "beim" and D₅ on the syllable "Blen-"; Sukowa leaps from F₄ all the way up to C₆! It is as though Sukowa chooses to use registration in place of dynamics to create the desired contrast on these two notes.

"Die Kreuze"

The last song to be composed in the cycle, "Die Kreuze" occupies a unique and strategic place in the final ordering of *Pierrot lunaire*. It is a dramatic and violent end to the darker, more macabre second tableau, in great contrast to the nostalgic, lighter third tableau. It also immediately follows the longest interlude in the cycle which was, according to Steuermann, the very last music to be composed.¹⁷ Though written for all the players in the ensemble, the first verse is written as a duet—or competition, more accurately—between the voice and piano. The complex piano line, written on three staves for seven of the first nine measures, is extremely dense and often very loud and

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¹⁷ Steuermann, 50.
accented. The first verse delivers some of the most demanding and vocally challenging music for the Reciter in the entire cycle. It requires an enormous amount of breath, a tremendous amount of sound, and a voice that can cut through the thick, bombastic piano part.

There are two critical issues at work in this song: tempo and fach. In these recordings, an incorrect tempo usually errs on the slow side, an error that can prove treacherous for the vocalist. The five recordings of “Die Kreuze” are no exception. Schoenberg marks “Die Kreuze” as Langsame with the $\downarrow = \text{ca.} 56$. Schoenberg’s recording with Stiedry-Wagner is exactly at that metronomic marking, as is Sukow’a’s. Pilarczyk’s performance has the $\downarrow = 44$; Minton’s is $\downarrow = 42$, and Schäfer’s comes in at a lethargic $\downarrow = 40$! “Die Kreuze” is already a tremendous vocal challenge due to register, dynamics, breath, and accompaniment; to perform this song at a tempo that is sixteen metronome clicks below Schoenberg’s marking is tantamount to committing vocal suicide. There is always room for a respectable margin of difference on either side of the notated tempo; when that margin not only grossly changes the character of the work, but also puts the singer in vocal peril, one is forced to question the tempo’s validity. It is no wonder that Christine Schäfer sounds taxed, tired, and uncomfortable. Schäfer is forced to breathe in the middle of words and phrases, frequently after having only sung a single beat. Schäfer breathes in the following places in the first verse:

- Heilge Kreuze ✓ sind die Verse,
- dran ✓ die Dichter stumm ✓ verbluten, ✓
- blind- ✓ geschlagen von der Geier ✓
- flaterndem Gespenstlerschwarme.

No singer wants to breathe in awkward places, but because of the musico-poetic phrasing of this verse, there will rarely be a breath that is not awkward. A radically slow
tempo only exacerbates the awkwardness and difficulty that is already inherent in this
song.

Schäfer certainly is not the only performer who has an ill-timed breath or two. Stiedry-Wagner and Sukowa both do, as well, even with their quicker tempi, but then some allowance should be made for them as they were not exclusively trained as singers. Pilarczyk also breathes in the middle of the first phrase, but then breathes in more logical places throughout the rest of the verse.

Yvonne Minton is the only performer who does not break up the first phrase with a breath, nor does she take additional breaths in awkward places. Minton’s ability to sing through a phrase is directly related to how she delivers the vocal line; she is singing with vibrato. Removing the vibrato—though necessary for the performance of Sprechstimme—can keep the breath from working efficiently, thus requiring extra breaths from the performer.¹⁸

The difficulty Schäfer experiences in these opening nine measures contrasted with Minton’s relative ease in the same material is not only an issue of straight tone versus vibrato. Difficulty versus ease of declamation for these two singers is also an issue of fach. Schäfer, a high soprano, is going to have considerably more difficulty projecting in this part of her range, especially when asked to do so against a loud, forceful piano

¹⁸ Straight tone singing makes one feel as though there is not enough breath to sustain a phrase, or that breath is being lost more rapidly. Straight tone does not, in fact, use more air; rather it impedes the natural function of the entire vocal mechanism. Straight tone is a combination of a tremendous amount of pressure—at, above, and below the vocal folds, as well as at the lower abdominals—plus the damming of the air so that it is not allowed to move through the folds at an even and consistent rate. Air is not in natural motion during straight tone; it is being held beneath the chords so that they are not able to vibrate. The tremendous sub-glottal pressure (pressure beneath the vocal folds) coupled with the tension one feels in the abdominal area makes it feel like one is working harder and using more air. In reality, the singer simply is not using the voice the way it is designed to work. In a breath-challenged and technically demanding song such as “Die Kreuze,” the technical difficulty inherent in the use of straight tone (particularly for a classically-trained, light soprano such as Christine Schäfer) is only intensified.
background. Minton, on the other hand, a mezzo soprano, has made a career of
successfully singing in her lower-middle register. As a mezzo, much of what she sings
lies between A₃ and E₅; she is expected to project and “cut” through an orchestra
differently than a soprano in a like range. These two singers perfectly demonstrate that
the issue at hand is not one solely of range but rather of timbre and strength of register.

At the start of the second verse, the other instruments enter and the mood of the
piece immediately changes. Sukowa’s declamation at mm. 11-13 is particularly
effective. Her portrayal of the first verse is, of course, very dramatic; at m. 11, however,
she makes a significant change. She sounds eerily resigned and defeated, and continues
on in the same manner through m. 16. Measures 17 and 18 mark a return to the vocal
character at the beginning; aggressive and demanding, she yells these final words.
Produced almost entirely in chest voice, she remarkably reproduces the pitches with
considerable accuracy.

Minton also makes an interesting choice in the same measures. She purposefully
removes all vibrato to depict the images in the text: death, the matting of the hair, and the
sinking of the sun. She allows the vibrato to return for the last phrase of the song,
“Heilge Kreuze sind die Verse.”

Stiedry-Wagner and Pilarczyk, on the other hand, have the least amount of
contrast in the B section. For Pilarczyk, everything is so speech-like that she greatly
limits the palette of colors available to her. Stiedry-Wagner’s declamation at mm. 11-13
sounds overly anxious. Though her delivery of the final phrase has potential—it is
aggressive and demanding—the full effect is lost due to balance issues. As in the Schäfer
recording, mm. 17 and 18 work best when the ensemble follows the score; the crescendo
is very gradual, begins from a **ffp**, and saves the loudest moment for after the voice has cut off.

**"Parodie"**

An oft-cited concern in regard to the interpretation of the *Sprechstimme* in "Parodie" is that if one does not perform the notes as written, the complex, highly imitative nature of the song is completely lost; the canonic structure will be rendered inaudible if the vocalist does not perform the "right" notes. As previously discussed, the exact duplication of pitch is not required to be aware of the imitative relationships.\(^{19}\) Performing the pitches as written is not necessary to understand the song, nor is it necessary to be aurally aware of the canonic techniques at work. The rhythmic contour of "Parodie" is quite sophisticated; it is distinctive from everything that has come before. It is almost impossible to *not* hear the imitative relationship between the voice and the rest of the ensemble based solely on the rhythmic elements. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to admit that *every* imitative aspect of the piece could be immediately heard: viola and voice begin the song in canon at the unison; the clarinet’s entrance intervenes in inverted canon at the ninth; at m. 16, the unison canon is now between the piccolo and voice, while the viola and clarinet begin another inverted canon at the tritone using new material; and later still (m. 22), there is a new canonic relationship between viola and flute, and clarinet and voice, respectively. Again, the aural sophistication required to perceive all of the preceding relationships is certainly beyond that of the average listener. The larger picture should be the focus here, and that is having the ability to perceive that this song is built on imitative relationships between pitch and rhythm.

\(^{19}\) See Chapter One, pp. 27-28.
These five disparate recordings aptly illustrate this point. With the wide range of interpretations presented and the hugely varying degrees of pitch accuracy, the imitative relationships are still blatantly clear. The rhythm is, for the most part, strict in every recording, therefore the relationship is immediately apparent. It is the very distinct rhythm of the opening vocal phrase—made even more so by the words attached to them—which shows that it is directly related to the rhythm of the viola. The percussive /k/ in the opening phrase (on the words “stricknadeln,” “blank,” and “blinkend”) helps establish the tone and character of the piece in a way that only the voice can do. The text, “knitting needles, brightly gleaming,” is clearly depicted in the vocal line, as well as within the instruments.

In all five recordings, the opening five measures are quite similar. The rhythms are accurately presented by all, with the exception of Sukowa, whose rhythmic energy is a bit more relaxed and not as clearly articulated. Four of the five recordings are also relatively accurate in regard to pitch; they are, at least, all in the right register (Shäfer and Minton actually performing the correct notes). Pilarczyk’s recording, of course, is pitched too low; it begins a minor seventh lower than notated. In spite of the discrepancy in pitch, thus clearly ruining the canon at the unison, it is nonetheless quite obvious that she is the follower to the viola’s leader in the canon.

Schäfer’s articulation in these opening measures is particularly clean and precise. Pilarczyk and Minton—an odd pairing as they represent the most spoken and the most sung, respectively, in these recordings—excessively use the aspirate /h/ during any melismatic passage, regardless of how short it may be. Any time the vocal line moves from one note to the next while remaining on the same vowel, neither Pilarczyk nor
Minton do so in a legato fashion; there is a “hiccup” in the line. While this may be an attempt at text painting or emphasizing the rhythm, it is more disruptive and distracting than it is effective, and unfortunately, continues through the remainder of the song.

Sukowa’s recording, in addition to being more relaxed, has more variation in pitch in mm. 1-10. Just as we saw the huge registrational contrast in “Rote Messe,” Sukowa continues to be freer with pitch (particularly intervallic integrity) in “Parodie.” The opening begins on the correct pitch, and throughout the following measures she follows the contour and maintains some semblance of intervallic continuity. At mm. 7 and 8, however, on the syllables –en and –na (on the word “Dueenna”) the first sixteenth note is at least a fifth too high; the second sixteenth note, conversely, is too low.

Particularly entertaining is her rendering of the word “murmeln.” Her throaty “murmuring” starts a fifth too low and spans the interval of a third.

Though there are slight rhythmic inconsistencies in mm. 9-10, the more intriguing discrepancies occur in mm. 11-15, particularly in Stiedry-Wagner’s recording. For example, she leaves out the third note of the triplet (F-natural in the score) on the word “liebt,” thus clearly altering the rhythm. The same note is barely sounded on the next iteration of the pattern in the word “Pierrot,” and she drastically changes the contour and leaves out yet another pitch in the next phrase, “mit Schmerzen.” She omits the second note of “Schmerzen”—G-sharp—thus lingering on the first note of the word. She also does not descend for the first two notes of “Schmerzen”; rather she starts on D-natural for “mit,” sings the same pitch for the first note of “Schmer-,” and then ascends to G5. The remainder of the word cascades down to end on approximately F4.
Though the quality of Pilarczyk's voice is awkward—she attempts to move in and out of her upper register without much success—her rhythm is accurate, and she follows the contour of the line very well.

Minton's rendering of these measures is representative of her work; everything is right on the mark (with the exception of the aspirate /h/) according to traditional practices. As usual, it remains very sung, pitch-perfect, and rhythmically accurate. There is a sense of breathlessness and anticipation in her voice on the words "liebt," "Pierrot," and "Schmerzen." She effectively depicts the text: "She waits under the foliage; she loves Pierrot with aching."²⁰

Schäfer and Sukowa both provide excellent interpretations of these measures. Schäfer's is very accurate, clean, and careful. Sukowa's is relatively conventional, for her, in mm. 11-12 and the first part of m. 13. However, on the words "mit Schmerzen," she returns to her more characteristic sound, using a timbre not unlike that used at m. 8 ("murmeln"). It is also pitched almost an octave too low so that the majority of the melisma occurs below the staff.

Measures 16-19 are essentially the same as in the beginning, and so there is little that is different from the first iteration of this text in the recordings. The small exception is Stiedry-Wagner; she clearly sings the word "blink" instead of "blank" in m. 17. Her performance of this same text, which was so clear and accurate at the beginning of the song, is now somewhat muddled as she stumbles over the text and sings the wrong word. She is likely anticipating the last phrase of the song in which the order of these two words is reversed (m. 29—"blink und blank").

²⁰ "Sie wartet in der Laube, sie liebt Pierrot mit Schmerzen."
Just as tempo has proven crucial to the declamation of the text and the rendering of the *Sprechstimme* in other songs, "Parodie" is no exception. Though all five recordings take approximately the same brisk tempo at the start of the song, only Schoenberg’s recording successfully navigates through the *ritardando* at m. 21 and into the new tempo at m. 22. This “somewhat slower” tempo (marked *etwas langsamer* in the score) at m. 22 is crucial to the portrayal of the text in mm. 22-26: “Then suddenly—hear—a whisper! A breath of wind titters lightly: the moon, that wicked mocker . . .”\(^{21}\) The *ritardando* must be significant enough to set up the new tempo at m. 22. The eeriness and mystery of the vocal line, as well as the depiction of the rustling wind in the flute and viola, is completely absent without the correct setting of the tempo in mm. 21-22. In addition to the tempo change, Schoenberg also wanted an even crisper, lighter vocal sound. In his conducting score, he marked *staccati* over every vocal pitch in mm. 22-23. Though Minton, Schäfer, and Sukowa wonderfully depict the text in these measures, particularly on the words, “der böse Spötter,” they would be better still if the tempo felt less hurried. Incidentally, not only is the tempo not correct in Pilarczyk’s recording, but her declamation also leaves much to be desired. There is virtually no change in her declamation in dynamics, articulation, or mood.\(^{22}\)

The overt change in tempo at m. 22 will also allow for a better *a Tempo* marked over the second half of m. 26. Of no small significance are the two additional markings Schoenberg made to these measures in his conducting score. In green, he marked a return to *Tempo I* (indicating that there was, perhaps, another intervening tempo?) in the

\(^{21}\)“Da plötzlich—hörch—ein Wispern! ein Windhauch kichert leise: Der Mond, der böse Spötter . . .”

\(^{22}\)Jan DeGaetani and Lucy Shelton also do an excellent *ritardando* followed by a slower *langsamer* than most other recordings.
latter half of m. 26, followed by an *accelerando* in m. 27.\(^{23}\) The *accelerando* is extremely effective, and for the singer, it is quite instinctive. Though not as noticeable with Stiedry-Wagner, there is a slight *accelerando* in Schäfer’s recording.

“O alter Duft”

Finally, brief mention should be made of the last song in the cycle, “O alter Duft.” Frequently cited as an example of Schoenberg’s return to tonality—hinted at not only in the harmonic language (E major/minor) but also in the text, which indicates a longing for the past—this song can present a grave temptation to the vocalist. Some performers argue that if this is Schoenberg’s return to the old ways, the song should be more sung than the other songs in the cycle. Indeed, it is difficult *not* to sing it; after all, almost the entirety of the vocal line’s first six measures is simultaneously presented in the top voice of the piano. Still, Schoenberg gave no new instructions for this piece. Just as in “Parodie” the vocalist was not instructed to sing those pitches more so than any other, so also in “O alter Duft,” the vocalist should continue on as she has in every other song: *gesprochen* unless otherwise indicated (and as it turns out, this entire song is *gesprochen*).

Though the opening measures are beautiful when sung—and Yvonne Minton does so very well—there is an even more intriguing, satisfying effect when performed as written. The text in “O alter Duft” is meant to *suggest* nostalgia, yearning, long-neglected pleasure, lovely things of the past, dreams; it is not meant to assault the listener

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\(^{23}\) Tempo I clearly refers to the tempo at the beginning of the song, but this also indicates that perhaps there was another tempo change elsewhere in the song. Performers frequently insert a slight *ritardando* in mm. 11-14; this *ritardando* is almost imperceptible were it not for the clear return to Tempo at the pick-up to m. 15. Though this additional tempo change is not marked in the score, nor did Schoenberg make any additional markings in his conducting score, there is a change in tempo in his recording at these precise measures.
with these images. These images are, in fact, brilliantly depicted—as only Schoenberg can do—when expressed through Pierrot’s “new” vocal technique. Sprechstimme hints and suggests at pitches without stating them outright; it evokes a contour, not a fixed, immovable object.

“O alter Duft” is an example of a song in which the ideal interpretation would involve the vocalist performing the correct pitches before gliding away. Stiedry-Wagner, Pilarczyk, and Sukowa come nowhere close to performing the notated pitches, though they do follow the contour of the line. Schäfer, on the other hand, once again does a wonderful job of hinting at the pitches that are there; she does so in this song by accurately performing the written pitches, but then immediately leaving them in search of the next.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Over ninety years after its premiere, *Pierrot lunaire* continues to incite controversy and debate among scholars and performers. From the performer’s perspective, specifically the Reciter, we are faced with the challenge of presenting an accurate and faithful, as well as an autonomously artistic interpretation of Schoenberg’s enigmatic *Sprechstimme*. Based on the last sixty years of *Pierrot* recordings, it is apparent that “accurate” and “faithful” are elusive and imprecise concepts that are continuing to be redefined with every new performance and recording. The disparity among recordings in the rendering of the *Sprechstimme* is evidence that traditions in performance practice have yet to be established or agreed upon. Traditions are absent, in part, because there are numerous “unknowable” elements which have been left open to a wide variety of interpretations. In the case of *Pierrot*, Schoenberg’s instructions are not comprehensive, nor were his intentions and desires expressly conveyed. Even if they were, it is certainly possible that what might have been an ideal interpretation to Schoenberg in 1912 could be something vastly different in 1945. Schoenberg’s inconclusive instructions, in conjunction with the interpreter’s artistic prerogative, allow for a wide spectrum of possible interpretations.

The lack of tradition or consensus in performance practice places the *Pierrot* interpreter in a difficult position. Is she forced to discover yet a new way of realizing the *Sprechstimme*? Where does she go for guidance? What are the reliable sources and how should they be weighted in helping to determine what comprises an appropriate, effective, and faithful interpretation? How we decide to prepare the *Sprechstimme* is
determined by a number of factors: how much time we have spent studying the score, how many recordings have been listened to, how many secondary sources have been consulted, as well as how much we take into account the opinions and perceptions of those around us. The purpose of this document is to assist the performer in her understanding and interpretation of Pierrot lunaire’s Reciter by organizing all of the relevant information into an accessible and comprehensive format, thereby allowing her to make better informed decisions regarding Pierrot's interpretation.

Upon beginning this project, I had hoped that sixty years of Pierrot recordings would finally establish clear parameters for the interpretation of Sprechstimme. I assumed that I would find traceable trends that would clarify what Sprechstimme is and what it is not, as well as make obvious which techniques are effective, appropriate, and accurate. Instead, I discovered that the recordings have done little to clarify the issue; there is essentially no consensus among interpretations. It is the revelatory nature of the work (that is, it continues to reveal itself through its vastly different interpretations) that allows it to remain “contemporary,” still placed under the umbrella of “new music.” That there is little agreement as to how the Sprechstimme should be rendered is proof that not only do we not know with certainty what Schoenberg intended of it, but also that there are still different interpretations to be presented. Sprechstimme is such a sophisticated and, unfortunately, ambiguous technique that it simply has not been possible to settle on a complete, all-inclusive, and objective definition of what it is and how to perform it. There are methods and techniques that are less appropriate and less successful than others (i.e. “singing” the entire work, pervasive use of vibrato, inserting portamenti between all the
notes), making a performance or recording less than ideal, but there are also a multitude of qualities which make for a successful and effective performance. It is therefore difficult to make a judgment that says any one interpretation is all right or all wrong. There are no absolutes in Pierrot; there are shades and degrees of right and wrong, successful and unsuccessful, appropriate and inappropriate.

Spanning over sixty years of recording history, it would not be unusual to assume that each generation of Pierrot interpreters has listened to those of the previous generation. In doing so, a singer often chooses certain stylistic traits which she finds appealing and incorporates those into her own performance. Though there are shared traits among the performances—portamento or sliding; vibrato or straight tone; exact pitches or a freely-interpreted melodic line—there is virtually no traceable element—no common thread—linking one interpretation to the next. While it is refreshing to think that this ninety-three year old work has an infinite number of ways of being performed, it creates a problem for the establishment of performance practice traditions. Clifford Curzon (a former student of the concert pianist, Arthur Schnabel) was once asked what he thought about the influence of the sound recording. He responded, “‘Well, it’s good and it’s bad. It’s a bad influence on young artists, because they all listen to records day and night. And anybody can copy anything, really. You don’t have to be really gifted. And I find that records are becoming a copy of a copy of a copy.’”¹ There is little worry of that becoming the fate of Pierrot lunaire.

Though the recordings have done little to establish clear performance practice traditions, they are extremely beneficial to the performer, aurally elucidating which characteristics and techniques do and do not work. Since Schoenberg did not address

¹ Philip, 244-45.
some of the most general elements of *Sprechstimme*—his thoughts about vibrato, the degree of pitch accuracy wanted—it has become the interpreter’s responsibility to make those decisions. Through close scrutiny of the recordings, we can separate the *Sprechstimme* into its individual components, determine how those components affect the interpretation, and can then make more informed and specific decisions about how to render the *Sprechstimme*.

So how does one put together a list of characteristics that would make for an effective interpretation of *Pierrot*? Though it is the deviations from the norm that often make an interpretation interesting (Barbara Sukowa’s recording is evidence of that), I believe that one should start by creating a list of what is ideal: what would make for a “textbook” accurate interpretation of *Pierrot*? Based on my research of the work, examination of the recordings, and my personal experiences interpreting *Pierrot*, I would offer the following basic outline:

- The vocal line should be performed without vibrato, with the exception of the *gesungen* pitches.
- Schoenberg’s pitches, as written, should be attained and then immediately abandoned by allowing the voice to fall off, generally in a downward direction by sliding. The *portamento* should be reserved only for those places specifically marked as a *glissando* by Schoenberg.
- Rhythm should be maintained exactly as if one were singing; on notes of longer duration, the vocalist remains on the vowel, allowing the voice to fall off in a downward glide, unless an upward direction is otherwise indicated.
Every musical marking should be followed as literally as possible; it is not the performer's responsibility to interpret any additional affectations into the performance: vocal characterizations, exaggerated articulations, costuming and make-up, gestures, etc.

A performance that follows guidelines such as these would certainly constitute a stricter interpretation than perhaps even Schoenberg envisioned. This does not mean, of course, that any interpretation which deviates from this list is wrong or even less than ideal. Particularly in regard to the second point, I believe there is a relatively wide margin of what can be appropriate and effective. Very few, if any, interpreters on the recordings actually perform every pitch accurately. Since Schoenberg spoke very little about pitch, one could infer that he was not terribly concerned with it. In fact, with the exception of the 1941 letter to Erwin Stein in which he expressed frustration with Erika Stiedry-Wagner's inaccuracy of pitch, Schoenberg never made an issue of "correct" or "incorrect" pitches.² He only insisted that the work not be sung, which is a separate issue.

Nevertheless, Schoenberg did arrive at a final notation of Sprechstimme in which pitch is exact. He notated precise pitches, therefore it is not unreasonable to assume that pitch was of some consequence to him, regardless of whether or not he talked about it. Stein believed that the intervals are only meant to be relative. He also allowed for the fact that the performer can not only transpose the part according to her individual speaking voice, but she can also narrow the overall range in which she performs the notes.³ I do not believe this is what Schoenberg intended. Helga Pilarczyk's recording is a perfect example of the ineffectiveness that occurs when one narrows the range so much

² See Chapter Two, footnote 43.
³ Stein, Orpheus in New Guises, 88.
so that it truly *can* all be performed in a normal speech register. Schoenberg did not write
the piece to accommodate such a narrow range. Though Stein and Boulez have both said
that the piece seems both too high and too low for any one interpreter (an erroneous
assumption), I believe that is precisely what Schoenberg intended by his use of
*Sprechstimme*; he wanted a speech-like quality in a range of the voice which is not used
for normal speech. It is therefore a heightened and altered speech sound, one which does
not resemble "realistic, natural speech."4 Perhaps it is not necessary to perform all of the
pitches precisely as written—there are very effective recordings which do not—but range
and tessitura are of considerable importance. When Schoenberg composed at the top of
the staff or above, I do not believe he intended those passages to be transposed down a
fifth, for example, to accommodate an individual's speaking voice. Doing so completely
changes the intended effect.

Likewise, vibrato is another element which drastically changes the overall effect
of the *Sprechstimme*. Though Schoenberg did not address this issue, I believe that a non-
vibrato interpretation is likely what was intended. There must be a clear and audible way
for the listener to differentiate between *gesungen* and *gesprochen* passages; the most
logical way to do so is to perform the *gesungen* passages with vibrato and the *gesprochen*
passages without vibrato. While it would also be possible to perform the reverse—all of
the *Sprechstimme* notes with vibrato and the *gesungen* ones without—that aesthetic
decision seems to go against the very translation of the technique: *speech-voice*. It does
not translate to *sung-voice*. Speech, for the most part, does not have audible vibrato.
True, we do not speak using some of the long rhythmic durations that Schoenberg
notates, but again, that is part of the uniqueness—and the challenge, incidentally—

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4 Taken from the Preface to *Pierrot lunaire*, Belmont Music Publishers, 1990.
inherent in the work and the technique. The responsibility of the Reciter is to find a way of performing these words, notes, and rhythms in a manner that resembles speech. It is determining that fine line between speech and song that has perplexed performers for almost a century, and will likely continue to do so well into the next.

It is true that the Sprechstimme can be rendered in a variety of ways while still remaining faithful to the score, but at what point does one boldly assert that Interpretation “X” is not a legitimate, valid representation of Schoenberg’s score? That question cannot likely be answered unless a tradition of performance practice is established. How far from the score can we stray before a performance is no longer Pierrot lunaire?

Schoenberg’s instructions certainly leave room for ambiguity, but at what point in an interpretation is it no longer the piece that he wrote? How sung must it be before it is no longer considered Sprechstimme? Does that make it a wrong performance? Yvonne Minton’s sung but highly expressive interpretation could be viewed as an argument against that. What she presents is certainly not ideal, nor is it at all representative of what Schoenberg wrote, but that does not mean that her performance is ineffective or without artistic merit.

What about the decision one must make regarding how to perform the notes: as written, maintain some semblance of intervallic integrity, follow the contour of the line, or perform a more open and free interpretation of the melody? If the ratio of correct notes to incorrect notes is skewed on the side of the incorrect, does that performance no longer qualify as legitimate? The recordings of Barbara Sukowa and Sophie Boulin, as well as Stiedry-Wagner’s, are powerful arguments against that. For myself, I had not anticipated enjoying or “approving” of a performance in which there was so little regard
for the notes Schoenberg wrote. Again, one does not have to perform every note exactly as written, but ideally, there should be some integrity between the performance and the score. Barbara Sukowa, however, rarely performs what is on the page, and yet her recording is one of the most exciting and “legitimate” in the discography. She reveals a visceral connection to the text, displaying a wide range of feelings, and a willingness to take risks, vocally and emotionally.

According to my proposed guidelines, Schoenberg’s recording with Stiedry-Wagner would not likely be considered the most effective recording in the discography. Balance and ensemble issues aside, Stiedry-Wagner’s recording does not display the depth of understanding and emotion that is heard in other recordings. Her performance is well-done, especially considering the place in history her recording occupies. Stiedry-Wagner had virtually no guidance to assist in her interpretation except for the instruction given by Stein and Schoenberg. Of course, their contributions were substantial, but their demonstrations or descriptions of the Sprechstimme would not be able to accomplish nearly as much as if she had been able to hear another performer’s interpretation.5

Christine Schäfer’s recording is the likely candidate for the “textbook” accurate interpretation of Pierrot lunaire. It is a very effective performance. There is very little audible vibrato on almost all Sprechstimme pitches, but a clear, even vibrato on gesungen pitches. Schäfer subtly slides between most pitches, and performs portamenti only when specifically notated. She performs most of the pitches as written, and in places where her pitch is not exact, she adheres to the contour of the melody, usually keeping the

5 There would be a huge discrepancy in the “translation” not only because they were both men attempting to demonstrate and explain how to perform this “new” technique (which was intended and written for a woman’s voice), but also because they were not singers or actors. This hardly made for an ideal learning situation for Stiedry-Wagner.
intervallic integrity in tact, as well. Schäfer presents thoughtful, well-crafted interpretations, never crosses the line into dramatically questionable areas, but portrays the character of each song with veracity and honest simplicity. If there is a weakness in her performance it is an uncontrollable one: her instrument is, perhaps, not ideally suited for this work. Schäfer's light soprano voice has difficulty in the lower-middle register, particularly in loud, densely orchestrated passages. A more dramatic voice—soprano or mezzo soprano—would be able to better negotiate the entire range and tessitura of the work.

Because there are relatively few undisputed directives regarding the performance of the Sprechstimme in Schoenberg's Pierrot lunaire, the vocalist is challenged to discover, on her own, how best to interpret the technique. She has a variety of resources at her disposal: Schoenberg's writings, the score, his recording, and the substantial discography. Perhaps the most valuable of these resources is the discography. Schoenberg's remarks are, of course, critical to the understanding of Pierrot, but they do not suffice when learning how to interpret a technique that is as ambiguously explained and notated as Sprechstimme. Oral tradition, in the form of the sound recordings, can help to successfully fill in the gaps.

Because of the unique character of the declamation suggested for Pierrot lunaire, there will always be endless interpretational possibilities. Just as no two people have the same speaking voice, neither will any two interpreters have exactly the same delivery of Pierrot's Sprechstimme. Though Pierrot lunaire has resisted the establishment of a tradition of performance practice, perhaps the times have now changed. Performance
practice does not eliminate individuality and uniqueness from a piece of music; it simply attempts to remove some of the less stylistically appropriate practices from the rhetoric, thereby lending some degree of standardization to a piece that has previously excluded it. The inscrutability which has always surrounded _Pierrot lunaire_ is not going to suddenly vanish because of the formation of a few well-chosen performance guidelines. These guiding principles can only ensure that one of Schoenberg's greatest works will become more accessible to a larger audience of students, performers, and listeners.
APPENDIX A

Pierrot lunaire Discography

The following Pierrot lunaire discography has been excerpted from Wayne Shoaf's official discography. Recordings are presented chronologically with the following information included:

- Reciter and voice designation;
- Ensemble (if a named group) and Conductor;
- Place and date of recording sessions (if known);
- Recording identification information: identification number, mono or stereo, CD or LP, date released. Since many of these recordings have been reissued numerous times, this information indicates the specific recording listened to for this document.


- Indicates recording available to the author and listened to for this document

❖ Indicates recording not available to the author for this document

1940


- Erika Stiedry-Wagner, voice. Arnold Schoenberg, conductor. Recorded New York Town Hall, November 17, 1940. This recently discovered recording is a partial performance which was later radio broadcast in New York. See Chapter Five, footnote 2.

1951

1952
- Hedli Anderson, voice. *London Symphony Orchestra Chamber Ensemble*; Peter Stadlen, conductor. (Master tapes were destroyed by fire before a disc master was cut—there is no extant recording.) This recording is included for two reasons. First, Hedli Anderson had been performing *Pierrot* for quite some time. Stuckenschmidt reported that Stein had heard a performance in London in 1942 in which Anderson performed the Speaker. She was described as having achieved “almost perfect intonation” (Stuckenschmidt, *Arnold Schoenberg*, 455). Second, the conductor for this recording, Peter Stadlen, is also the author of the oft-cited 1981 article from *Music & Letters*, “Schoenberg’s Speech-Song.”

1954

1955

1957

1961


1962

1963

1968
1970


1973


1974


1976

1977


1981

1983
1985

1987

1988

1989

1990

1991
1992


1993


1994

1995

1996

1997


1999


2000

APPENDIX B

Pierrot lunaire Order of Songs

Teil I
1. Mondestrunken
2. Columbine
3. Der Dandy
4. Eine blasse Wäscherin
5. Valse de Chopin
6. Madonna
7. Der kranke Mond

Teil II
8. Nacht
9. Gebet an Pierrot
10. Raub
11. Rote Messe
12. Galgenlied
13. Enthauptung
14. Die Kreuze

Teil III
15. Heimweh
16. Gemeinheit
17. Parodie
18. Der Mondfleck
19. Serenade
20. Heimfahrt
21. O alter Duft
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16. Gemeinheit
17. Parodie
18. Der Mondfleck
19. Serenade
20. Heimfahrt
21. O alter Duft
No. 17 – Parodie
Stricknadeln, blank und blinkend,
In ihrem grauen Haar,
Sitz die Duenna murmeln,
Im rotten Röckchen da.

Sie wartet in der Laube,
Sie liebt Pierrot mit Schmerzen,
Stricknadeln, blank und blinkend,
In ihrem grauen Haar.

Da plötzlich – horch! – ein Wispern!
Ein Windhauch kichert leise:
Der Mond, der böse Spötter,
Äfft nach mit seinen Strahlen -
Stricknadeln, blink und blank.

Parody
Knitting needles, brightly twinkling,
stuck in her graying hair,
sits the Duenna mumbling,
wearing her short red dress.

She’s waiting in the arbor,
she loves Pierrot with anguish.
Knitting needles, brightly twinkling,
stuck in her graying hair.

But suddenly – hark – a whisper!
a wind-puff titters softly:
the moon, that cruel mocker,
is mimicking with moonbeams
knitting needles twinkling bright.

No. 21 – O alter Duft
O alter Duft aus Märchenzeit
Berauschest wieder meine Sinne!
Ein nährisch Heer von Schelmerein
Durchschwirrt die leichte Luft.

Ein glückhaft Wünschen macht mich froh
Nach Freuden, die ich lang verachtet:
O alter Duft aus Märchenzeit
Berauschest wieder mich!

O Ancient Scent
O ancient scent from fabled times,
one more you captivate my senses!
A merry troupe of roguish pranks
pervades the gentle air.

With cheerful longing I return
to pleasure I too long neglected.
O ancient scent from fabled times,
one more you captivate me.

All meinen Unmut gab ich preis,
Aus meinen sonnnumrahmten Fenster
Beschau ich frei die liebe Welt
Und träum hinaus in selge Weiten . . .
O alter Duft – aus Märchenzeit!

All of my gloom I’ve set aside:
and from my sun-encircled window
I gladly view the lovely world,
and dreams go forth to greet the distance . . .
O ancient scent from fabled times!
# APPENDIX D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 11 – “Rote Messe”</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 14 – “Die Kreuze”</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 17 – “Parodie”</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 21 – “O alter Duft”</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. Rote Messe.

Piccolo.

Bass-Klarinette
(in B).

Bratsche.

Violoncello.

Rezitation.

Maßig rasch (♩ ca 80)

Zu grauem A.-bendmahle beim Blendeglanz des

Klavier.

(liegen lassen bis zum Zeichen ♪)

Gol. des, beim Flackerschein der Kerzen, naht dem Al.
molto rit. — Tempo

die gottgewalzte, zerreißt die Priesterkleider.

molto rit. — Tempo

molto rit. — Tempo I.

Zu grauem Abend nahle beim Glanz des

molto rit. — Tempo I.

Langsame (ca se)

Heil'ge Kreuze sind die Vers., der Dichter stumm ver.

bluten, blind geschlagen von der Geister flatternden Gespenst schwarz me.

immer marcato (non legato)

In den Leibern schweig'en Schwerter, prunktend in des
wird der Lärm des Pöbbels. Langsam sinkt die Sonne.
Heilge Kreuze sind die Ver...
17. Parodie.

Piccolo.

Klarinette in A.

Bratsche.

Rezitation.

Klavier.

Musiknoten mit Text: "Strick...nadeln, blank...und..."
die Düen un mut melnd im roten

Röckchen da

Sie wartet in der Laube, sie lebt

Pierrot mit Schmerzen.
Strick- nadeln, blank und blinkend, in ihrem wieder begleitend

Etwas langsamer.

Da plötzlich- herch- ein Wis- pen! ein Windhauch kichert lei-se.

Etwas langsamer.
Der Mond, der böse Spötter, stift nach mit seinen Strahlen

Strich nahe, blink und blink.

Überleitung zu „Mondfleck“

Sehr voll und gewichtig.

Bewegt (d. ca. 60)

O alter Duft aus Mür. chenzeit, be. rau. schet wieder meine

Bewegt (d. ca. 60)

Sin. .. ne! Ein trärrisch. Heer von Schel. me. rein durchschwirt die leich. te Luft. Ein glückhaft

poco rit.

pp

pp

U. K. 6534. §536.
Wünschen mach' mich froh nach Freuden, die ich lang vernachtet.

Alter Duft aus Märchenzeit, brechste wie der mich. All meinen...
Unmut geb ich preis; aus meinem sonnenraum, ten Fenster, 

träum hin aus in sel'ge Weiten... O alter Duft, aus Mär, ebenzeit!
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Books


**Dissertations**


**Musical Scores**


