

PIERROT LUNAIRE QUESTIONNAIRE.

How many times to date have you performed PIERROT? Over a hundred.

When/where was the first time?

Dartington 1965 followed soon after by live BBC Invitation Concert from BH.

Had you heard other performances/recordings?

I avoided it at first, just skimmed through old Saga record – Alice Howland – not v. interesting, but it gave me an idea of what sprech-stimme was – vaguely!. Heard Mary Thomas do staged versions and was daunted, too young to know how good or accurate it was. Then I tried never to hear others UNTIL I had to do a British Library event, and mined the archive for All available recordings old and new - some impressive, some awful, most in-between. Some live performances as well as recordings. Have also attended a few more live performances recently, AND visited the Schoenberg Centre in Vienna to hear other recordings including Schoenberg's earliest. (a part-performance live in New York).

Ones I particularly like are Anja Silja, Lucy Shelton (closely resembling mine – I think she may not be unfamiliar with it!), Luisa Castellani, Marianne Pousseur, Mary Thomas, Helga Pilarczyk, and, 'live', Natalie Raybould. (an excellent young artist).

Roughly how long did it take you to prepare your own part?

*A few months off and on, initially, but really I never stop working on it!
I was lucky in having returned recently from studying amongst Germans so the language was less of a problem.*

How many rehearsals did you have with the ensemble?

About 20 – I was shaky with the rhythms and Susan Bradshaw, pianist , coach and mentor, had to bully me quite a lot. There was no conductor.

Did you perform it with/without conductor?

Without, (still my preference, and I've done it thus with Avanti (Finland) and Psappha (UK) often but it's a nice luxury to have a conductor now and again, though I don't need to look at him/her. Haven't the heart to relieve Roger (Minstrels' conductor) of the task, and if rehearsal schedule is tight, it helps to have the beat.

Did you perform it from memory?

*Not at first for 3 or more years, then I was forced to do it staged and costumed for a special performance so learnt it for that – discovered I already had it in my memory!
Have done it from memory ever since.*

Where did you stand on the platform in relation to instruments/conductor?

I prefer to be separated at the side of the ensemble, slightly forward, in good eye contact with conductor (if present) and able to react with instruments. Don't like being in centre of ensemble– can't hear.

Were you 'miked'?

Only when I did it with Boulez – he insisted. It removed the effort of riding the texture in loud bits, and made it an altogether more lightweight experience.

Was it 'staged' /in what costume/ with lighting? Any other visual effects?

Have done it many ways – sometimes costumed,(clown or various black and white combinations) Often with lighting (effective). Once with lovely projections on Castle walls at night in Finland. But don't really approve of too much distraction – the piece speaks for itself. Video artist's moving images on screen alongside Psappha performance. Basically prefer it as a concert piece.

Did you make movements/gestures?

At the very outset, I worked out a programme of small hand gestures (different degrees of prayerful for Nos. 6, 11 and 14 for instance, and subtle suggestions of the action for nos. 16, 17 and 18 – horrified clutching of face in 13, etc.) but I prefer not to move around too much.

How did the audience react? (please describe basic composition of audience, age. etc.)

All audiences respond to the piece's power once they can be got there! Middle-class conservative audience in Sussex were warmed up by a pre-concert chat and , to their surprise, loved it! Have performed it to many different groups of people, both modern music fans and others, students, Further Education types, etc. (Gresham College especially rewarding – mix of generally cultured people not musicians) A wonderful recent audience in Manchester, full of genuine music lovers and amateur string players – totally receptive and eager to hear something different. Rather different from the Sussex crowd.

What was your basic approach to the sprech-stimme, especially regarding accuracy of pitch as well as rhythm?

Determined to be as accurate as possible in all respects. In those early days there was no-one to help so I worked out my own way, and incorporated many unorthodox sounds to make it more expressive. Over the years, I've developed more resources to get nearer to what I want, but it's still tricky. I try to keep nearer to speaking, which is more clipped than singing, but am busy analysing the problems of what to do BETWEEN the notes. Glissandos are not appropriate much of the time, as they can obscure contours. Am pre-occupied by timbre and response to syllabic details.

Did you start by speaking /singing it?

Plunged right in and tried to do a combination from the start.

Did you read the texts in advance? Did you have to do extra work on the German or not? (Or did you do it in English? -which translation, if so)

Didn't read them much before leaping into the music – that's how I like to do it– kind of agree with Schoenberg's own views on the music saying it all, but I have subsequently studied and thought about the texts in great detail. I love the SOUND of the poems – word music in its own right, irrespective of meaning. Although my German accent was considered quite authentic (see above) I did have rigorous coaching with a Viennese friend/language expert, who dealt with many specific verbal details, as my German is only colloquial and I didn't have a firm grasp on grammar and syntax. I'm told my accent is old-Viennese, which I'm rather pleased about! I've never done it in English – basically feel that it's simply not as effective – Schoenberg meant THAT syllable for THAT note, although of course there's an accessibility issue. But there are some good singing translations (Andrew Porter, and one by Roger Marsh I've just acquired.) Have done excerpts in FRENCH (not the original Giraud but a translation from the German!) with the Nash for a broadcast. Very odd.

Do you find the texts predominantly a) poignant b) dramatic c) disturbing d) ironic e) humorous, or a combination of these?

Absolutely all of these.

Do you see the work as Expressionist or ironic- satirical, or a mixture?

This is the combination I am constantly aiming at!

Do you conceive it, interpretatively, as a) an example of 'fin de siècle' Post-Romantic decadence .b) a sophisticated form of cabaret. c) a heightened form of dramatic declamation or d) ripe for a contemporary 'make-over'? (Other personal insights welcome!)

All of these, though I'm wary of the last, wondering if Schoenberg would approve. I know he didn't even like the idea of it as a ballet! A puppet version would be fun (and I'm sure must have already been done.) People have already made electronic scores and collages using fragments. Not surprising that it inspires imaginative ideas, and I'm basically sympathetic to the idea of experimenting.

Which movements do/did you find most difficult a) musically b) vocally/technically c) balance-wise d) stamina-wise e) interpretatively.

*a) **Der Dandy , Nacht, Rote Messe, Enthauptung, Heimweh, Mondfleck.** Almost all because of rhythmic co-ordination without conductor – and keeping a rigid beat in **Mondfleck!***

*b) The end of no 1, plus **Madonna, Nacht, Rote Messe, Enthauptung, Die Kreuze, Gemeinheit, Serenade.***

*Specifically because of some low loud notes required , and long phrases.(especially **Nacht**, always my bugbear - wish I was a mezzo!)*

*c) All of those above, plus the dilemma of how to achieve the 'accompanying' role in no.4. and how to cut through the dense texture of **Mondfleck.***

d) the same lot as above! Support muscles fully used. All of Part II and nos. 15-16 are quite taxing at first.

e) How to set the scene at the very start, how to make **Columbine** 'charming' and 'different', how to do no. 4 (bland/detached). Wondering if there is any element of humour (grim) in *Madonna*, getting the contrast at the end of **Der Kranke Mond**; **Rote Messe** – similar problem to *Madonna*. All of **Heimweh** (great variety and a new feeling entering the picture). **Gemeinheit** most of all – how to keep humour mixed with cruelty – similarly, **Serenade** though not so extreme. The *Barcarolle* – to keep the lightness and joy while not pre-empting the last movement, which HAS to be serene and poised. I think making an effective transition from one movement to another is one of the challenges. (and concentrating during the one instrumental 'interlude'.)

Do/did you attempt to characterise the movements individually (using different timbres?)

Yes, very much so.

What are your favourite movements? Why?

Nos. 3, 7, 9, 10, 14(esp. the end), 15, 17 (especially!!), 20, 21 (the relief!!)
Lots of delicious quirky detail to negotiate, and scope for characterisation. But it's ALL very satisfying. Lovely to be able to be really QUIET in no. 7 and do subtle inflections without worrying about balance. (Ditto no. 21) Enjoy the sheer charm of the *Barcarolle* and the unadulterated contentment for the first time – no more nightmares.

Are there any individual moments of interplay with instruments that you especially relish?

Masses! **Columbine**, meshing in with the flexible violin. **Der Dandy** with the wacky clarinet (also in **Gebet an Pierrot**). Surging up with the instruments at the end of **Valse de Chopin**. The passionate close (with cello) at end of *Madonna*. The duet with the flute (no.7) responding to one another. The clanking bones that accompany **Raub** – also the rhythmic co-ordination here. Interplay with cello at the gory climax of **Rote Messe**. All the lurching in and out of tempo in **Heimweh**. The rhythmic poundings and ironic flute twinklings in **Gemeinheit**, and of course, the marvellous canon with the viola, imitating one another in **Parodie** – my absolute favourite. The duologue with cello in **Serenade** is also great fun. I love the bubbling watery sounds in the *Barcarolle*, especially the perky flute motif that precedes 'Der Strom summt tiefe Skalen'. and the staccato that comes just before 'ein närrisch Heer von Schelmerei' in the last movement.

What aspect do you feel you need to work on further?

Getting the rhythm of the syllables and their timings even tighter, and making sure not to leave out the ironic element – constantly monitoring the *sprech-stimme* for

*unwonted 'singing'. That loud high 'Mu(tter)' at the end of **Madonna**, where there's no opportunity for a glissando. Bringing out the Viennese-y elements even more.*

How has it affected your other work – vocally, artistically, aesthetically?

It has had the most far-reaching effect on my entire career – has been central to my repertoire for more than 40 years, and has taught me more about the workings of the voice than any other piece. It has increased my tendency to be analytical about articulation and timbre. Musically it has been a huge stimulus to my appreciating a vast amount of other music, and reinforced my belief that the drama is inherent in the music and the sound, and hardly needs external visual effects. It's an object lesson in perfection of text setting – so meticulously wrought. Hugely satisfying and one never grows tired of it. It also continues to make me angry when people don't appreciate the sheer natural genius of Schoenberg. He is still woefully misunderstood.

Have you tackled any other works involving 'heightened speech' (**Façade**, etc.). How did they compare?

*Yes, lots, especially by young composers in the 60s and 70s. Boulez uses sprechstimme sparingly but effectively, to inflect the ends of phrases in **Le Soleil des Eaux** and **Le Marteau** (low for me, but possible because of light dynamics). I've done **Façade** quite a bit – here of course there are no pitches specified, so it's 'easier' though characterisation and accents are another preoccupation, and one does need miking. It's a huge advantage to be a trained singer for the bits when it gets slow and one has to delay the arrival of a syllable on the beat. Actors find it scary! Tod Machover wrote a superb work to a Joyce text which has all varieties of sprechstimme and things in between speech and song. Brian Elias's solo voice extravaganza **Peroration** is a tour de force of varieties of speaking, whispering, screaming including sprechstimme and 'normal' singing all in quickfire juxtapositions. Birtwistle's **Nenia –the Death of Orpheus** was written for me and has the narrative declaimed in short attacks over another stave with the expressive part of the 'scena'. And of course there's Max's **Miss Donnithorne** which I do a lot now – this veers between speech and singing (and variations en route) constantly and is great fun to perform – also has a very close musical and aesthetic affinity with PIERROT – lots of moon references and parallels in the content. And there's his huge solo monodrama **The Medium** – even more of the same, covering the whole gamut of expressive vocal devices (I don't know that I would ever use the term 'extended vocal techniques' – it's either 'normal' technique applied to modern or complex musical gestures, or else a requirement to make slightly unorthodox sounds which could be familiar in other contexts – babies screaming, animal noises, whispering, shouting – actors are used to controlling speech at different levels and intensities whatever happens the vocal mechanism tend to perform the same way one has trained it to do!) No-one else has ever attempted a complete work in 'Schoenbergian' sprech-stimme but it's been a vast influence, and all the of the above works would not have existed without it.*

Did you have a pianist/coach to help you rehearse/learn it?

I could never have managed without Susan Bradshaw in those early days. I was not used to difficult rhythms and out of my depth, daunted by the presence of senior musicians such as all the Vesuvius Ensemble. Now I CAN manage by myself!.

Did you work on it with a voice teacher – was this helpful?

No – there was no-one suitable, when I began work on it, and I battled away at it on my own. Players couldn't help, but my then singing teacher Yvonne Rodd-Marling was interested and sympathetic, and confident that I would not do myself an injury. Have heard of many voice teachers who discouraged people from doing 'modern music'!! Yvonne had been an actress so had a different view.

When practising/rehearsing/ performing PIERROT, did you ever experience any problems of vocal fatigue? If so, how did you address them?

For the first year or two I did experience a bit of roughness, and tried to avoid singing a day on either side of a performance, but improved muscular co-ordination and conservation of air (and experience, including increased stamina and knowing how to pace myself better) have meant that there's no problem any more – I always feel fresh at the end of a performance, and often elated!

Please add any other reflections , including how subsequent performances have affected your view of it, and how confident you feel/felt about performing it.

I still find it very exciting to contemplate performing it - it never fails to get one in the mood. Although I feel I know it very well now, it's essential to concentrate – its' so easy even now to make the odd slip and be caught unawares, One can never afford to take one's eye off the ball! There can be a danger of a dip in concentration a few movements into the piece, and then again near the end, as the finishing tape is in sight. I'm aware of the danger points now. It can never be taken for granted so it's always just a little scary at the start before it settles.