

Voicing Pierrot My Personal Journey

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To say that *Pierrot Lunaire* has been crucial to my career would be an understatement. It's the single work that has most influenced my development, shaped my attitudes to rehearsing and performing, and taught me about the way the voice works. It featured in my first BBC 'live' broadcast in 1965 and I've derived endless inspiration and joy from performing it at regular intervals, with many different ensembles in many countries, in a rich variety of situations. My earliest experiences were, inevitably, self-centred. I actively avoided hearing other performances for many years, feeling vulnerable, and fearful of having my confidence undermined, or, worse, of lapsing into unconscious imitation. But in recent years I've found it stimulating and beneficial to hear and imbibe others' performances. My repertoire has, meanwhile, expanded to encompass many other substantial and challenging twentieth century pieces. It's been helpful to get to know more of Schoenberg's own life, and to be able to place the work in a wider context. This process of collating and assimilating information and influences is of course never-ending. Even taking time to muse and cogitate can yield sudden unexpected flashes of insight and new perspectives. Artistic instincts have always to be kept sharpened, ready to embrace the flood of new ideas that occur with virtually every reading of this extraordinary work.

The re-discovery and commercial release, in 2005, on *Regis/Forum* of one of my very earliest performances could not help but evoke a mood of especially piquant personal reminiscence. That recording was made in 1967 at Olympic Studios in London, and I now realise that it was actually the first one to be made without conductor. It was brought into being by the devoted efforts of my earliest mentor: the late, sorely-missed pianist, Susan Bradshaw. Susan had abandoned an early ambition to be a composer, after a period of study in Paris with Pierre Boulez, but continued to move in the most exalted contemporary music circles. She attended the Darmstadt Summer School in its epoch-making days of the late fifties and early sixties, and found inspiration in the work of conductor Hans Rosbaud in particular. A collaborative rapport and close friendship with Hans Keller, that unsurpassed musical thinker and commentator, acted as a spur to her activities, as both executant and organiser. Invaluable support came from the BBC, where William Glock was at the helm. When Glock suggested the formation of a new ensemble for the express purpose of performing *Pierrot Lunaire*, Keller continued to dispense advice and encouragement to the resultant Vesuvius Ensemble, as they developed their interpretation.

The recording was made roughly two years after I first became acquainted with this endlessly compelling, many-layered masterpiece. The mid-sixties were marked by a spirit of optimism, eager creative responses to the challenge of the new, and an idealism that is perhaps difficult to recapture

in today's more commercially-driven world. Dartington Summer School, under Glock's inspirational direction (with that invaluable link to the BBC Music Department) was the breeding ground for many fresh talents, as well as the perfect environment for appreciating great artists and thinkers, including the Amadeus Quartet, Vlado Perlmutter, George Malcolm and of course, Hans Keller. I still recall vividly the sheer vibrancy of the atmosphere, intimidating at first for a young singer from Norfolk, unused to sophisticated cultural circles, with but a small, recently acquired repertoire of contemporary music. Songs by Dallapiccola, Messiaen and Webern comprised my entire knowledge of 20th-century classics. I'd been introduced to the last of these by Graham Treacher on an earlier visit to Dartington as a schoolteacher amateur, and, at his urging, had auditioned for the Park Lane Group¹.

At another of my very early Dartington forays, I met Peter Maxwell Davies, who was, like me, still a schoolteacher at the time. I was roped in to take part in a concert of works by some of his Cirencester Grammar School pupils. No doubt as a result of his exceptional tutelage, their pieces were astonishingly assured, and 'advanced' in idiom, and I recall how very kind and encouraging 'Max' was to me. I little dreamt that I would eventually have the pleasure of performing some of his own 'post-*Pierrot*' works, especially *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*² and I was certainly not aware that, soon after, we would be involved in 'rival' *Pierrot* performances at around the same time.

My pianist for the Park Lane Group audition and resulting recital (in 1964) had of course been Susan Bradshaw — our first meeting, and a most auspicious one. I had very little idea of suitable repertoire, and it was Susan who chose those Dallapiccola and Messiaen works for the concert, and who then suggested me to Glock for the *Sprechstimme* part in the planned *Pierrot Lunaire* with the new ensemble, later named Vesuvius. The other core players were flautist William Bennett, clarinettist Thea King (now, alas, also sadly lost to us), violinist doubling on viola Kenneth Sillito, cellist Charles Tunnell and Susan herself. From the outset it was decided to perform the work without conductor.

These were heady times in my early career. Bombarded by new influences I was somewhat dazzled, but, fortunately perhaps, was protected by that raw, unfounded confidence of the complete novice. I was not fully aware of the sheer scale of the task ahead or properly conscious of the daunting seniority in experience of my instrumental colleagues. Looking back on that time, I can't help wishing that I had remembered to ask Susan more about Hans Rosbaud, Boulez and those vintage times of Darmstadt and Donaueschingen. I regret to say that I have never appeared at either of these German Festivals. (New music factions now seem to be much more polarised than they were then.) I'd also narrowly missed meeting composers Luciano Berio, Bruno Maderna and Luigi Nono at Dartington, and though I and the Vesuvius worked there with Gilbert Amy, I did not realise his significance in the French new music world of the time. Indeed, one of my greatest regrets is that in the early stages of my career, when working abroad, although I had the chance to meet and work with many leading European contemporary specialists of the day, including distinguished Schoenbergians such as the pianist Maria Bergmann and conductor Ernest Bour, I was quite unaware, in my naivety, of how much their knowledge and insight could have helped me. It was a squandered opportunity.

It is now quite difficult to re-create the mixture of awe and elation I felt in launching myself into *Pierrot Lunaire* for the first time. It was rarely heard at that time, and I was shamefully unaware of the weight of its importance in musical history. Lacking the cultural background to savour its connection with *commedia dell'arte*, or the musical experience to follow the stylistic developments of Schoenberg and his contemporaries, I had only the haziest notion of what *Sprechgesang* actually was.

A performance by Rosemary Phillips had formed the opposite half of a concert in which I'd sung in 1964, but I had never seen the score, was quite out of my depth with the erudite discussions going on around me, and totally unable to relate the music to anything I knew, despite having recently been introduced to those late Webern songs³ by Graham Treacher.

Unfortunately, no singing teacher was available then to help cope with the vocal demands of the piece. I was left on my own as far as the *Sprechstimme* was concerned. Since the requirements did not seem to relate to 'normal' singing, even other musicians did not feel qualified to make constructive suggestions. I now realise what a boon it was to be forced to work independently.

Susan Bradshaw was assiduous in helping me learn the music, in particular coaxing me through what then seemed to me incredibly complex rhythms within a constantly-fluctuating pulse. Her patience was limitless, though I fear she must have found it all highly frustrating. Her quick mind and nimble command of the keyboard were already legendary. Dispensing with a conductor did of course make it all doubly difficult at first, although having to listen acutely was to prove advantageous in the long run. It was slightly easier for me when the piano part had a strong leading role to cling to, but I was still unused to hearing instrumental timbres. All my experience thus far had been with organ or piano accompaniment, mostly in local oratorio work in my native East Anglia. Perfect pitch was, I suppose, quite a help initially. The visual impact of a line instantly translates into the actual pitches in one's ear, but finding those notes in the voice simultaneously is not always easy — that is more a matter of technique. It was some while before I realised the fundamental technical issue: that *Sprechstimme* has to be given full support as if singing normally, and that much strength and stamina are required.

In a way, youthful ignorance protected me from being overwhelmed. Faced with the score in piano reduction, I set to work with no organised strategy in mind. Even now, unlike many of my fellow singers, I rarely go to the text first when tackling a new work, though language and literature do mean a lot to me. The impulse is to plunge directly into the music and try to assimilate some of its essence, before grasping at more tangible verbal images. I've been intrigued to learn from Schoenberg's own writings that his attitude was not dissimilar.

At the time there was much talk about the virtue or otherwise of an 'accurate' vocal performance. I knew from the start that I wanted to try to adhere to the pitches the composer had written and to obey his every marking as far as I was able. My senior colleagues were forbearing and supportive as I groped to master the musical challenges of the piece, including that unfamiliar discipline of chamber music, with so much more than an accompanying harmony instrument to worry about. My mental resources were well and truly put to the test. Each of the twenty-one movements required a level of vocal awareness and concentration far beyond my experience, and at the same time it was essential to keep track of what everyone else was doing.

Apart from the problem of how to sustain a pitch without actually singing, there was the question of sound quality. I allowed myself just one sample hearing of one of the few recorded versions around; that of Alice Howland with an American ensemble on a *Saga* LP⁴. This was my starting point to allay initial curiosity, but I felt I should like to go rather further in varying tone colour and dynamics. It seemed there could be licence to incorporate sounds and timbres not normally acceptable for standard repertoire, but which could add considerably to the expressive palette of this searingly dramatic work. Whining, groaning, grating, gurgling, snarling, even screeching, could all make telling contributions where appropriate. A close examination of my own speaking voice became necessary, either in dramatic declamation, or in relaxed 'chatting' mode. I began to wonder

if Schoenberg himself had experimented with the natural colours and inflections of his own voice⁵.

I urgently needed some formula to help with my preparation for what was, for me, a huge leap in the dark. So I duly made a rough catalogue of moods, characters, vocal timbres and possible small hand gestures that I hoped could be suitable for each movement, corresponding to the images in the text. (I still have those tattered pages pinned inside my third copy of the piano reduction, the previous two having fallen apart from overuse.) I was especially anxious to avoid the monochrome effect of continual crooning undulations, and I felt that a full *vibrato* might be employed for some of the more impassioned and violent sections.

It was now time to adopt an even more rigorous approach to the music's detailed requirements, and to address specific problems of maintaining *Sprechstimme* without lapsing under duress. Schoenberg's own indications in the Preface to the score⁶ unfortunately give rise to more questions than they answer, and have provided much material for debate ever since. The vocalist mustn't sing, or speak, but should guard against a 'sing-song' delivery. However, the contours of the written phrases are to be observed and pitches can be touched and left instantly by way of upward or downward *glissandi*. This last is all very well, but doesn't cover all eventualities. For instance, I immediately came across the problem that occurs when notes lie close together, moving in slow tempo. Swooping too far distorted the written line, and some modification of tone was surely necessary to avoid 'normal' singing.

Meanwhile, the poetry with its fascinating sound world, independent of its actual meaning, began to haunt me. I tried to conjure up in my mind Pierrot's journey: the silvery nocturnal landscapes giving way to bloodstained quasi-ecclesiastical images, often mixed with cruel mockery, returning finally to homely nostalgia and sunlit warmth. The Otto Erich Hartleben texts (translated from the Giraud originals) are of course a joy in themselves: alliterative, sibilant, highly evocative and sensual to the feel of lips, tongue and palate. Freshly returned from a year studying with Frederick Husler, I felt reasonably confident with the language, having spent much time amongst Germans singing and speaking their own tongue. I'd striven to imitate them, incorporating idiomatic touches. A close friend, the late Henriette Fishlock, Viennese music-lover and language expert, whom I'd met on the train coming back from Dartington, was an enormous help in checking my progress and identifying the finer points. Nowadays I am told that my accent sounds quite authentically 'old Viennese' which is rather pleasing!

A most encouraging and unexpected boost to my confidence came from Rudolf Kolisch, Schoenberg's brother-in-law, and the violinist/violist in early performances with the composer. He heard my efforts while at Dartington and said he believed I had actually managed to find a genuine *Sprechstimme*, one that would have pleased the composer. This meant a great deal to me, as can be imagined. In amusing contrast to that: after that first performance of *Pierrot Lunaire* at Dartington, a woman accosted me backstage and proffered some advice on supporting long notes. She clearly thought I'd been trying to sing properly and couldn't sustain the pitches!

During the early years of my work on *Pierrot* I did attend a couple of staged performances in Dartington and London by the late great Mary Thomas and the Pierrot Players, an ensemble that had been just been formed by Peter Maxwell Davies and Harrison Birtwistle. These two contrasting interpretations — the Vesuvius always favoured a purely concert version — shadowed one another through the late sixties and early seventies, with both ensembles touring the work regularly. At that time I did not yet have the piece from memory, and, in the darkened auditorium, admiring Mary's impressive feat of theatricality and musicianship, my confidence was somewhat dented. As listener

as well as performer I was still very much the novice. Comparing notes with others on an equal basis had not yet entered my realm of experience.

Not long after this, I had an encounter with Helga Pilarczyk, the distinguished German interpreter of Schoenberg, whose performance of *Pierrot* I had not yet heard (but now greatly admire). She said that people had told her that I ‘sang’ *Pierrot*. It was her strong view that to pitch the correct notes was simply not feasible without lapsing into singing. She was especially forthright in asserting the impossibility of negotiating that unnervingly soft high passage (‘*Steig, o Mutter aller Schmerzen, auf den Altar meiner Verse*’) in no. 6 *Madonna* at its written tessitura.

Her solution was to pitch it much lower. The occasion of this meeting with Pilarczyk was an adjudicating assignment for a Schoenberg singing competition in Rotterdam, which had turned out to be a somewhat dispiriting affair. Very few singers had entered, and only one with a voice that could pass for professional. Unfortunately this candidate, a baritone, was regularly off-pitch. To my chagrin, and that of the administrators of the competition, my fellow jurors allowed themselves to be swayed entirely by the views of the senior member, distinguished musicologist and Schoenberg pupil, Max Deutsch. As self-appointed guardian of the Schoenberg legacy, he made the astonishing assertion that one could not expect such advanced music to be sung accurately. Protests were swept scornfully aside. This was an uncomfortable reminder that sometimes those who claim to be serving the memory of a composer may not always be willing to encompass the idea that standards of musicianship continue to rise, and that younger artists may indeed be capable of performing ‘difficult’ music accurately.

It has been amusing to discover that Pierre Boulez crossed swords with Max Deutsch in the past. Reading his extensive correspondence with the ethno-musicologist André Schaeffner has been enlightening⁷. According to Boulez, Deutsch’s attitude displayed ‘a certain state of mind of the *Schoenbergkreis* — its “*alte Fassung!*”’. Deutsch had taken the trouble to write to Boulez after his Schoenberg concert in Paris in 1961, expressing disapproval of the interpretation of *Pierrot* (with Pilarczyk as soloist), saying that all one needed was to follow Schoenberg’s instructions in the Preface to the score. Writing back with elaborate politeness, Boulez asked for precise guidance on this, and received the extraordinary reply: ‘*Sprechgesang* gives vocal unity to the fifty minutes of *Pierrot*, just as it does to the three hours of *Wozzeck*.’ As the timings were so wide of the mark, Boulez ceased to bother further with this line of communication.

In my early *Pierrot* performances I remember how much I needed that brief interlude of respite for the voice at the end of no. 13 *Enthauptung*. The only purely instrumental section of any length in the piece, it afforded a chance to re-fuel vocal and mental resources, and gather strength for the following movement, *Die Kreuze*, perhaps the most taxing of all for a young soprano. For this and other powerfully-driven sections, the voice had to be given full muscular support, using the lower part of the body. Otherwise there could be the danger that a timbre intended to depict deep anguish and suffering might come out as merely petulant.

Dynamics were of course of tremendous importance. In 1967 my young voice lacked some expressive fullness and security in the deepest range, and I found this frustrating. No. 8 *Nacht* remains the one movement where I should have liked to be an alto. The very low, ghostly, sung ‘*verschwiegen*’ was quite out of my range.

Here Pierre Boulez’s suggestion, of closing on to the final ‘*nn*’ and holding it, improved matters considerably, and it’s now many years since I needed to take the upper *ossia*. Another helpful suggestion he made was to interpret the *tremolando* marks over ‘*ver-lernt*’ in Movement 9 as ‘flutter-

tongued' and to roll the 'r's.

This is greatly preferable to the unfortunate 'bleating lamb' effect that comes from attempting single-note trills on the vowels.

Gradually, over the years since those early performances, I've veered closer to 'speaking' the lines, using a clear, unforced delivery where rhythms and pitches allow, in order to throw the more impassioned full-bodied moments into sharper relief. It is still no. 8, with its deep range and phrases which tend to dip down at the ends, that always needs special attention, to adjust balance and prevent the voice from being overwhelmed.

An increasing awareness of the varied timings of consonants and the controlled release of longer 'liquid' syllables ('l', 'm', 'n', 'zz', etc.) has given rise to a much more disciplined approach, as confidence with the musical hurdles has continued to grow. 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. Even now small details can sometimes be overlooked. Only recently I re-discovered a tiny *crescendo* in no. 2 *Colombine* (at the end of 'Sehnen') that I had been neglecting, since being away from the score for such a long time.

Some performers are a little shy of attempting to carry *Sprechstimme* up to the higher register, especially when at a loud dynamic. They do not quite dare emit something that could come out as an ugly screech. However, I've found that a *non vibrato* scream, employed in the upper register, can be wonderfully effective and quite appropriate to the more violent images in the text, solving usefully some of the balance problems encountered when working at full volume. Keeping the tone starved of air, using muscles instead of breath, makes it surprisingly easy on the voice. It is my view that such sounds can contribute an extra dimension of intensity, as long as the tone is properly supported.

When I first began working on *Pierrot*, I occasionally used to find that, perhaps due to insufficient technical prowess and over-enthusiasm, I had been pushing my voice too hard. I would notice a slight roughness and lack of tonal clarity the following day. Younger singers have reported similar problems when learning the piece. Now, after more than forty years of performing it, I realise that it has taught me more about the workings of the voice, and, crucially, about muscular co-ordination, than any other piece. Indeed, I've found that a painstaking study of *Sprechstimme* leads to a much more detailed knowledge of one's instrument than anything in the standard vocal repertoire. The possibilities for analysis are almost endless. Valuable lessons are learned about how to protect the voice and conserve energy. One returns to the classical repertory with heightened awareness and increased technical assurance. Potential problems are highlighted and can then be solved. *Pierrot Lunaire* as a tutorial may seem an odd concept to some, but it is to be warmly recommended.

Many of my earlier performances were marred by occasional small, mostly rhythmic mishaps, perhaps inevitable, bearing in mind the sheer difficulty of the work and the concentration required, both physical and mental. Eventually these were ironed out, and my confidence began to increase. Even now, when seasoned performers are involved, discrepancies are not uncommon. In the sheer excitement of performing, accidents can so easily happen. Pacing oneself through the piece is important. During the central, most demanding sections, it's vital not to lose control, and to leave something in reserve for the later strenuous movements such as nos. 16, 18 and 19, before the gentler mood of the last two settings brings relief and rest.

Rapport with one's instrumental colleagues is always a vital ingredient of a satisfying performance. The special emotional charge generated by 'living' the work together in an atmosphere of

mutual trust, transmits itself to the listener very powerfully. The hushed ending can bring a wonderful sense of time suspended, as the audience keeps a lingering silence, unwilling to interrupt the dream. It has been a shared spiritual journey.

Of course, the dynamics of recording or filming the work can be quite different: one's own favourite 'takes' are not necessarily those used for the finished product, and patience and adaptability are needed. The interests of ensemble have to come first, and *Pierrot* is far from being a vocal soloist's ego-trip!

Re-visiting my earliest recorded interpretation, now exposed publicly after a forty-year time lapse, has been salutary, but not as uncomfortable as feared. My performance has developed over years of experience with countless different groups and situations, with and without conductor. The 1967 recording sounds perhaps more 'sung' and has more *glissandi* than I currently favour, and I now tend to move more swiftly on to consonants wherever possible. But the conviction and flexibility of the ensemble testifies to a rigorous and substantial rehearsal schedule. The belated emergence of the recording was made all the more poignant by its timing, just before Susan Bradshaw died. It represents one of her finest achievements. Her incisive, passionate playing is a *tour de force*, and it is a moving testament to her musical devotion and integrity. The inspired contributions of the other players recall a time when cherished projects were allowed to mature without haste, before commercialism came to dominate artistic aspirations, in our increasingly pressurised and competitive world. People today may not even have associated such illustrious senior musicians with this repertoire at all, bearing in mind the current proliferation of musical *côteries*, in ever-narrowing fields of specialisation.

The Vesuvius recording is in sharp contrast to a later recording I made, still in the catalogue. It was recorded in 1977 as a BBC Open University LP, then acquired by Chandos, who later transferred it to CD. A very young Simon Rattle in his first *Pierrot* shaped the music with assurance and élan, and I vividly recall the wonderful moment when Nash Ensemble cellist, Christopher van Kampen, hit a miraculously perfect harmonic at the end of no. 15, and the delighted gasp from us all had to be stifled instantly. Tempos are generally brisker in this performance than in the Vesuvius version. By that time I had also put in more detailed work on the German, and felt a good deal more confident about the musical demands. It seemed a great luxury to have a conductor's beat for no. 18 *Der Mondfleck*. When comparing my three commercial recordings of *Pierrot* (the third was in Århus, Denmark, in 1983 with the Elsinore Ensemble), the technical development in my voice is clearly apparent. I have also tidied up more of the attacks and word endings, to get them precisely in time. I now believe that close attention to the micro-rhythms in the text offers the key to a disciplined performance, and that the composer himself must have been aware of this.

The Vesuvius Ensemble and I toured continually with the piece in the late sixties and seventies, and performed it regularly in London and for the BBC. A two-week Scottish tour in 1971 was rendered starkly memorable when I severed a fingertip in a train lavatory door en route to the first concert in Haddington. A resourceful colleague rescued the piece of flesh from the hinge, and the train made an emergency stop in Doncaster, where, at the Infirmary, it was sewn back on. Heavily-banded, I caught the next train, and arrived just in time to perform *Pierrot* in the second half of the concert. This gruesome episode seemed to lend a certain *frisson* to the performances, and audiences were all agog to hear the details, since it was impossible to hide the thickly-wrapped digit.

In early performances I was often worried by balance problems, aware that the voice is only one of six virtuoso instruments. Certainly, when I performed the work with Pierre Boulez in a Roundhouse

concert for the BBC he felt that a microphone would help my light voice. This instantly alleviated the strain of projecting the louder moments, and of course made *pianissimo* passages much easier, but it felt rather like cheating. It is Boulez's strong view (as expressed in my interview with him in 2006) that the work should always be adapted to the natural weight and *tessitura* of each individual performer's voice⁸.

A particularly exciting occasion for me was a performance on the South Bank in London with an ensemble consisting, intimidatingly, of Richard Adeney, Gervase de Peyer, Pinchas Zukerman, Jacqueline du Pré and Daniel Barenboim — the latter pair recently married, radiant and happy. Vanessa Redgrave declaimed English translations of the poems.

The conductor for that concert was Zubin Mehta, who later invited me to give the Israeli premiere in the Mann Auditorium in Tel-Aviv. These performances marked my first attempt at memorising *Pierrot*, and they were also semi-staged: I wore a traditional clown costume, with pointed hat, and white make-up. Happily, I discovered that almost all the music, with specific pitches and rhythms, was already deeply embedded in my consciousness, and memorising was not the worry I'd envisaged. Since that time I have always dispensed with the score, but am glad of the extreme care taken in those early concert performances while I was still grappling with details.

As to costume for concert performances: I now tend to improvise a black-and-white outfit from my current wardrobe — usually some kind of trouser suit, with a jacket. My favourite accessory is a special silk cravat in a bold design. I was greatly touched when Dorothy Dorow, now in retirement from her distinguished career, made me a gift of two delightful 'Pierrot' brooches — one of a crescent moon, the other a clown's head. I wear these with much enjoyment and pride⁹.

Over the years there have been a great many exciting and varied *Pierrot* experiences. The precincts of Turku Castle in Finland at night supplied one of the most hauntingly atmospheric settings I can recall. By then I was performing the work regularly with my own young ensemble Jane's Minstrels. To be surrounded by the young musicians whom I'd hand-picked individually for their all-round qualities some twenty years ago, remains an ongoing pleasure.

Finland's ensemble Avanti!, whom I met just before the formation of Minstrels, decided to dispense with conductor soon after rehearsals began, recognising the rapport and confidence that we all felt. The resultant sense of freedom was wonderful. Performances with them after that were always from memory and without conductor. Mutual trust was thoroughly tested and the experience was liberating. We made several tours together, including visits to some remote and beautiful parts of Finland for the myriad festivals that fill their summer months. Concerts were traditionally followed by long and often riotous sessions in a lakeside sauna. The standard of music-making in Finland was a revelation. It is not at all surprising that Finnish musicians are now gaining their deserved international recognition. Musically-gifted families keep the tradition going through successive generations, helped by what seems to be an exemplary educational system. Of the ensemble I worked with, at least two are now acclaimed international figures: the young Sakari Oramo, doubling on violin and viola, now of course one of the world's finest conductors (for several years, Simon Rattle's successor at the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and appointed as Principal Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra from the summer of 2013), and clarinettist Kari Kriikku, a charismatic virtuoso and dedicatee of several stunning new concertos.

In September 2009 it was a special joy to return to Finland to perform *Pierrot* at Helsinki's Finlandia Hall with members of the Radio Symphony Orchestra. Sakari Oramo again assumed the roles of violinist and violist instead of conducting. Preceding this he'd directed a thrilling



Figure 1: Jane Manning with Roger Montgomery, conductor (on R) and members of Jane's Minstrels, after the performance of *Pierrot Lunaire* at Turku Castle, Finland in August 1996. Photo credit: Jane Manning.

performance of *Die Jakobsleiter* in which I took the *Sprechgesang* part of 'Der Sterbende'. It was a memorable occasion, with so many Finnish friends both on and offstage, and a typically discerning but warm response from a large audience of genuine music lovers.

I have recently become re-acquainted with a performance in Sydney, Australia in 1984, broadcast 'live' by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation at a concert with the excellent Australia Ensemble, at the University of New South Wales. This came some time after the Nash/Rattle recording, and I'm intrigued to find that my voice sounds a little younger and more girlish than I expected, with more *legato*, perhaps a little nearer to singing than the way I now prefer. The atmosphere of the 'live' performance (and what sounds to be a substantial and appreciative audience) undoubtedly contributes to the spontaneous effect. The instrumental playing under Graham Hair is full of character and exuberance, and the balance is generally successful.

In the last few years I have toured the work with the enterprising and gifted Manchester-based ensemble Psappha, again performing without conductor. Video images created by Kathy Hinde, not actually illustrating the *Pierrot* poems, but reacting to them in colourful and imaginative ways, were projected on a screen.

A dramatised re-creation of the work's Viennese premiere, as part of BBC TV's 'Vienna 1900' series was unforgettable. As 'Albertine Zehme', in full *Pierrot* costume (though authentic sources indicate that it should have been Pierrette) and white face-paint (unfortunately, battling with a streaming cold!), I had to be bundled off stage by angry hecklers. Happily, I cannot recall any such

adverse reaction to any of my own performances over the years, although I have indeed performed *Pierrot* at both of Vienna's major concert venues, the Musikverein and the Konzerthaus.

At Hampton Court not long ago, an open-air performance offered a few hazards and distractions: a rogue breeze blew the players' music over, a flock of ducks landed on the lawn in front of us, and loud contributions were made by overhead aircraft as well as the small tourist train which cruised the perimeter with an audible commentary. This was quite a test of professionalism, but grist to the mill of experience. The bonus was a carefree holiday atmosphere, with a family audience sitting on the grass or moving around freely.

Pierrot Lunaire is of course a uniquely personal vehicle, and one can't help feeling a little proprietary about it. At first, fearing unconscious osmosis from contact with others' interpretations, I needed to work on my own until I felt more secure in my grasp of the piece, especially of its technical demands. Learning from one's own evolving experience is a subtle and constantly-shifting process, something akin to sculpting: chipping away, smoothing, polishing, making indentations and — hopefully — leaving some personal stamp of identification. I am always aware of what a privilege it is to take an active part in a great work.

I suppose it's inevitable that pitching remains a major preoccupation in my attitude to performing it. In common with other musicians of advanced years, I sometimes find that my hitherto very reliable sense of pitch now has a tendency to slip a semi-tone. This is apparently a normal development and one can adapt to it. Some radio performances occasionally seem to sound a semi-tone above their actual pitch. Even though, with absolute pitch, seeing a note means instinctively hearing it at pitch, technical problems may militate against attaining perfect intonation. The voice has to be responsive enough to produce a clean attack in the centre of the desired pitch. An alternative way of acquiring pitch security is to memorise the sound, timbre and, most of all, the physical sensation ('muscle memory') of a given note, but this, of course, will be subject to vagaries of dynamic, accent and colour. I have long felt that relative, rather than perfect pitch, is the more useful tool of the true musician, and have tried to concentrate on developing this. To gauge and tune intervals satisfactorily, the ear has always to check relationships with the accompanying instruments, aiming to match them in vibrato, colour and resonance.

A fascinating and productive ongoing study, employing a pitch-tracking computer programme at Glasgow University, is seeking to monitor the fluctuations of pitch that occur from movement to movement of *Pierrot*, and from performance to performance¹⁰. Early results, based on my performance of no. 12 *Galgenlied* have proved somewhat unsettling. It appears that, in order to inflect swiftly away from the written pitches, I have gone rather further than I imagined — a salutary exercise. *Galgenlied* is not perhaps an easy example: a real tongue-twister, it moves at breakneck pace, and all attacks are short, leaving little time to check pitches. Even within such a brief span of manic activity, the range of the pitch spectrum revealed electronically is, frankly, astonishing.

One feels that Schoenberg, always a gadget man¹¹, would have loved to have had access to today's digital technology, and might have enjoyed this kind of analysis. I am convinced that his exploration of vocal possibilities, especially in relation to the female voice, remained sadly unfulfilled and incomplete in his lifetime. It is significant that later works involving *Sprechstimme* favoured male voices, and were less rigorously notated with regard to pitch.

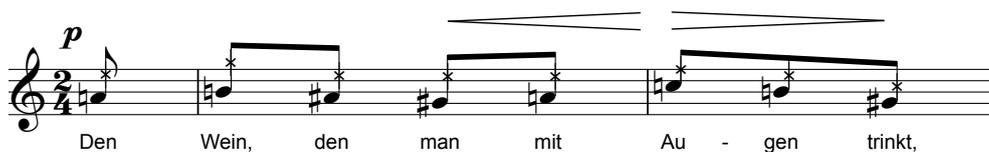
Over the last few years, armed with greater confidence, and spurred on by the award of a three-year Arts and Humanities Research Council Fellowship at Kingston University to study the *Pierrot* voice part and its influence in greater detail, I have tried to follow all performances and recordings

that come my way, and to discuss them whenever possible. This has included canvassing the views of fellow vocalists. The results of a questionnaire have yielded some important insights, and I'm grateful to many friends and colleagues who have given their time for this. I'm aware of the danger of being hyper-critical of others' efforts. We are all engaged in striving to do our best with this notoriously challenging but ultimately rewarding work. There is still an upward trend in musicianship amongst young artists, and intelligent, thoughtful young singers seem to be in abundance. In one's senior years it's all too easy to rest on past successes and become too possessive about favourite works, unwilling to praise the efforts of younger colleagues. Almost all *Pierrot* performances I've attended recently have been admirable. It is not always the experienced artists who set the best example. Some younger performers have brought an invigorating freshness to the work, and proved themselves well able to cope with its demands.

Pierrot Lunaire will always occupy a central place in my affection and artistic consciousness, and I am ever-grateful that it came my way at such an early stage in my career. It never fails to generate a charge of excitement and eager anticipation each time another performance beckons. I feel sure that Schoenberg would have relished the care and commitment that present-day exponents give to this greatly-loved and perennially intriguing work, and that he would be much heartened by its retention of a prime place in the chamber music repertory. On a personal note, I do, of course, hope fervently that he might have approved of my own efforts¹².

I will now proceed to deal with a sample movement (the first: *Mondestrunken*), and seek to identify the predominant sounds and syllables that contribute to their sonic effect. Further comments on the other 20 movements are available in my book *Voicing Pierrot* (Manning 2011), and recordings of the instrumental parts only are available on the CD which accompanies it, as an aid to learning and practising.

The speaker starts off in the role of Narrator. The scene leaps instantly into the mind's view: a ghostly moonlit landscape filled with feelings of foreboding, combined with a certain conspiratorial mystery. The moon's rays are described as wine, imbibed through the eyes. Far from forming a decorative backdrop, they are violently active, gushing down in torrents, brimming over the horizon. (The distant horizon is a regular feature of the work as *Pierrot* travels towards it.) The singer-narrator has just a few beats to conjure up a mood of awed fascination and dangerous excitement. Eventually the poet himself is revealed centre-stage, reeling drunkenly in the moonlight, stretching up his head to quaff and slurp the moonbeams in an almost religious ecstasy.



A steady tempo has to be set at which the opening words can be spoken naturally. A good rhythmic pulse can be established from the start, with each quaver slightly separate. 🔊

Dynamics are light to begin with, but, whatever their context, consonants should always be loud — even whispering effects have to maintain intensity. A slightly breathy 'hushed' quality is appropriate for the opening bars, but the tone needs to be clear and penetrating for the louder moments that come later. The comma after '*Den Wein*' at the beginning denotes a very slight

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gap (but no breath) to clarify the sense. In general in German, one must always be aware of the importance of, first, the verbs, and then the main nouns, in identifying the central points of the texts. Thus: *'trinkt'* should have a clearly percussive *'k'* and *'t'*, and the expressive *'giesst'* can have a prolonged, hissed double *'s'* to enhance its effect.

A small descending *portamento* on the first syllable of *'Wogen'* is practicable. Bending the note quickly away avoids lapsing into a sung tone. *'Und eine'* can be articulated with glottal attacks, taking the opportunity of the onomatopoeia of *'Spring-'* with its lively consonants, and elongating the vowel of *'-flut'* to create a dynamic springboard effect. Sliding down on the double *'mm'* of *'-schwemmt'* helps avoid singing. 



The first instance of a *'gesungen'* (sung) word on *'stillen'* needs special attention. It seems to work better if given a straight, pure tone with hardly any *vibrato*, so that it stands out in sharp relief from the more vibrant *Sprechstimme*. It's better not to breathe on either side of *'stillen'*, but to go seamlessly from one mode of delivery to the other. This may take a little practice. In the phrase beginning *'Gelüste'* the rhythm is somewhat tricky. The sibilance of *'schauerlich'* can be exaggerated and the *subito pianissimo* on *'süss'* is extremely important. This is a favourite dynamic feature of Schoenberg's work, often, as later with a *crescendo* leading up to it.  The long *'s'(z)* can be lengthened to effect a poised release into the vowel.

'Durchschwimmen' may need some repetition to run easily at full speed: *'durch'* is one of those small words that can expose a lack of idiomatic German — it should be remembered that the *'ch'* is the *'soft'* one as in *'nicht'*, not the more guttural version as in *'nach'*. A downward *glissando* on the vowel of *'Zahl'* is comfortable, and it can then be joined easily to *'die Fluten'*. (Remember that the German *'l'* is formed with the tongue nearer the teeth than its English counterpart).



Der Dich-ter den die An - dacht treibt, be - rauscht sich an dem heil - gen
Tran - ke gen Him - mel wen-det er ver-zückt das Haupt

In the repeat of the opening text, semiquavers should be evenly controlled, and dotted rhythms consistent within the *decrescendo*. It may go slightly against the grain to lessen the dynamics after the strong *'giesst'*. 

The singer's re-entry on '*Der Dichter*' marks the first potentially dangerous vocal moment for the *Pierrot* novice. Too enthusiastic an attack, especially after taking a re-fuelling breath, can cause forcing on the 'd' sounds which may jar the throat. It requires a conscious effort to let go of jaw and neck muscles and keep the vowels open, especially during the long 'i' of '*Dichter*'. Following on from this, one could be tempted to snatch extra breaths in the effort to project strongly, but this can all too easily result in gustiness and hyper-ventilation.

It is always important to look out for German cases and word endings: words such as '*den*' and '*dem*' must be defined clearly, and the characteristic long 'e' can sometimes betray the non-German speaker. Glottal attacks on words beginning with vowels are of course idiomatic. The sibilance of '*berauscht sich*' can be savoured, and the voice can then relax for the prolonged liquid consonants of '*heil'gen Tranke*', sliding over intervals and lingering on the double 'm' of '*Himmel*'. ♫ Clear enunciation, with clipped, detached syllables, in steady rhythm, is needed for '*verzückt das Haupt*'. This whole section is the work's first real test of stamina, and the loud dynamics mean that it is important to support all hard consonants, fully engaging diaphragm and stomach muscles, to prevent undue pressure on the throat.



Even if there is a conductor, it is unwise to rely on the beat without listening to the other musicians. The flute has an important programmatic role as the flickering moonlight, with its trills and soft *staccato* (especially just before the re-entry on '*Gelüste*'), and the violin often gives a strong quaver pulse both in *pizzicato* and bowed notes. As always, the piano provides a firm bedrock of support, and its loud left hand chord before '*Der Dichter*' is a major rallying point. It is necessary to listen carefully to the violin to catch that return to tempo just before '*und taumelnd*', and also to the piano's low semiquavers near the end of the movement, making very clear the difference between the voice's final dotted rhythm and the piano's triplet. This means leaving the second syllable of '*Au-gen*' to the very last moment.

Hissed or 'buzzed' sibilants predominate in this movement — those on '*saugt und schlürft*' can be made much of, and the rolled 'r' of '*schlürft*' helps in sliding easily across the triplet, making sure that the arrival on '*Wein*' is exactly in time. ♫ There is always time to vocalise all liquid consonants, including the 'w' of '*Wein*', so that their release can be controlled perfectly. The movement's final phrase can be regarded as 'in parenthesis' and may be delivered blandly and casually in contrast to the preceding histrionics.

Breathing places for each movement have to be decided in advance: I would suggest taking breaths after '*trinkt*' (first verse) and '*nieder*'. A quick one can be snatched imperceptibly in the tiny gap after '*Spring-*', which then makes it possible to go through to the end of that sentence (up to '*Horizont*'). Another short breath after '*Gelüste*' should last until the end of '*Fluten*'. Breath can again be taken after '*trinkt*' and '*nieder*'. In that crucial final section, it works very well to breathe after '*treibt*', '*Tranke*', '*Haupt*' (the latter's well-rounded vowel is very expressive), and finally after '*Wein*', ready for the 'throwaway' *coda*.

Finally, I have appended in Figure 2 a few examples of pitch-tracking of the opening phrase from my performance of *Mondestrunken* (notes 1–8), courtesy of Mr Ben Hillman of the Glasgow University Science and Music Research group, which I referred to earlier in passing. These were obtained from the phonetic analysis program Praat¹³. The pitch in cents relative to A440Hz is shown on the vertical axis, and the time in seconds elapsed through the recording on the horizontal. Each syllable is given treated separately. Schoenberg’s instructions for the rendering of the *sprechstimme* have been described (by Boulez and others) as somewhat contradictory, perhaps even impossible, or (at best?) utopian. The graphs presented here tend to suggest that, empirically speaking, despite a good deal of variation, the most common pitch trajectory of each syllable takes the form of an inverted parabola, rather than the idea of “touching a pitch and sliding away” which Schoenberg’s comments suggest. Clearly, there will be further research on such questions in times to come.

Figure 2: Pitch trajectories in *Mondestrunken*, first phrase

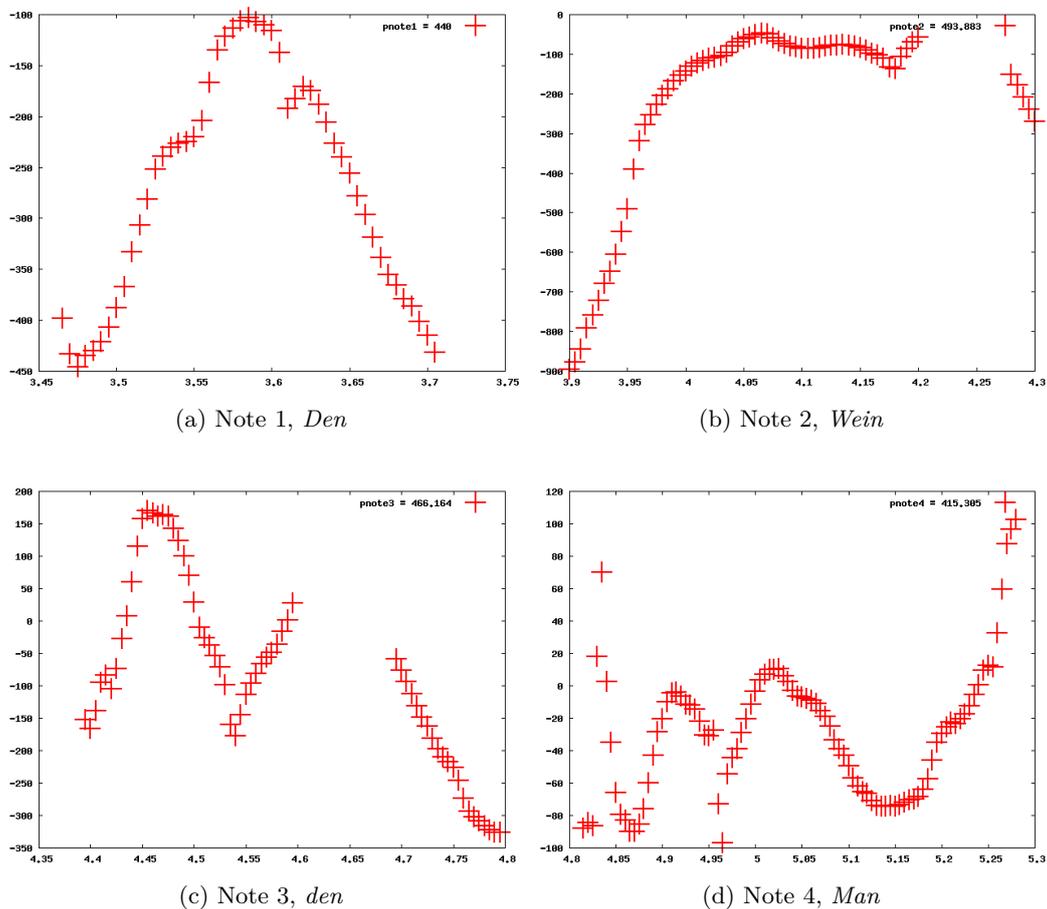
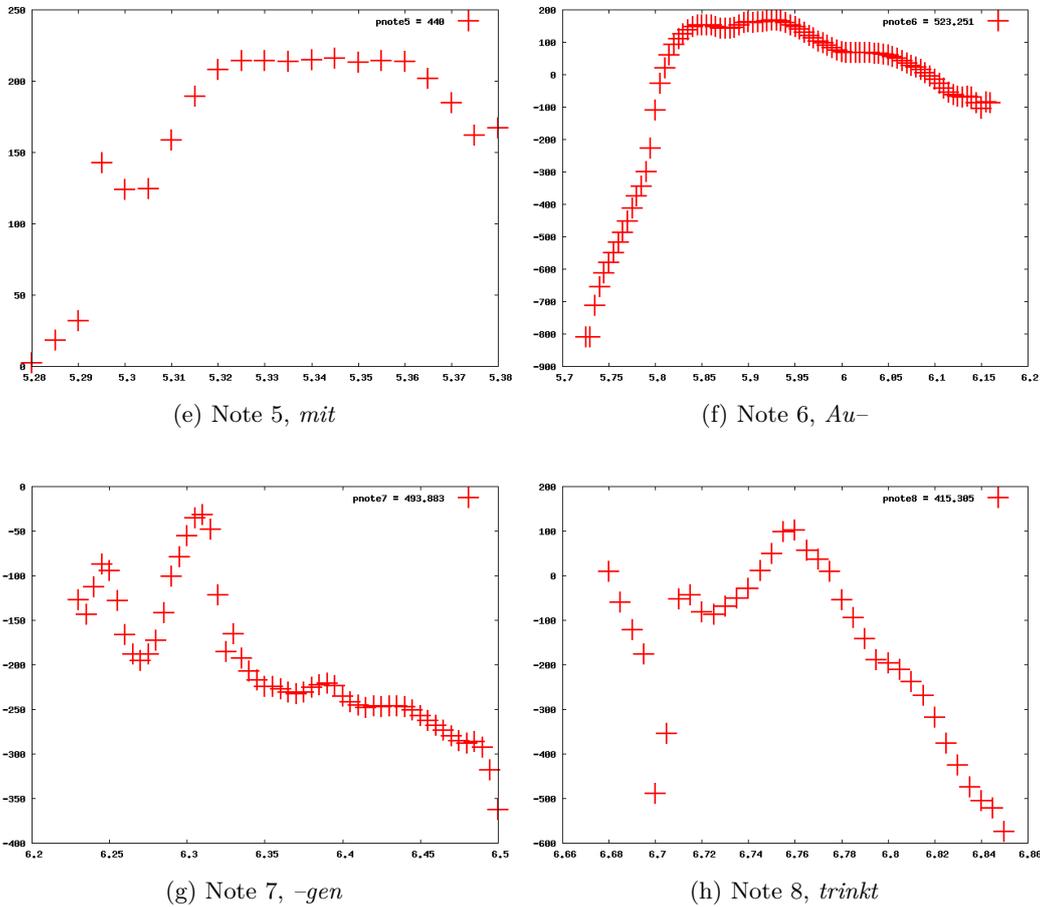


Figure 2: Pitch trajectories in Mondestrunken, first phrase: continued



Notes

1. The Park Lane Group, formed in 1956 by John Woolf, continues to this day under his indefatigable leadership. (Susan Bradshaw was a founder member.) Young artists are given the valuable opportunity of shared London recitals, in programmes of contemporary music of all styles, from established classics to new pieces.
2. Music theatre work for soprano and six instruments ('*Pierrot*' ensemble plus percussion) written for Mary Thomas and the Fires of London in 1974.
3. Webern's *Drei Gesänge Op. 23*.
4. Saga LP no. XID5212
5. Pierre Boulez says that Leonard Stein told him that, for the Los Angeles premiere of *Ode to Napoleon*, Schoenberg did indeed demonstrate the voice part (cf Conversation with Pierre Boulez, p. 123)
6. That published by Universal Edition (1923, renewed 1950) UE 7144.

7. André Schaeffner (1895–1980). He and Boulez kept up a lively correspondence for more than 15 years. Their letters can be found in Boulez and Schaeffner 1998. The originals of the letters are in the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler, Paris (Boulez's letters to Schaeffner) and in *La Collection Pierre Boulez* at the Fondation Paul Sacher, Basel (Schaeffner's letters to Boulez).
8. Pierre Boulez: '*Sprechstimme* is a monster... A very strange effect can be realised. With a healthy voice it is more controlled.' (Boulez and Adorno 2001).
9. Dorothy Dorow tells me that for her performances (more than 20 in Europe) she wore a black and white ensemble and a wig, with white make-up. She was amplified, and sat on a stool in a pool of light, making small hand gestures as appropriate.
10. *Empirical Pierrot*: a project based at Glasgow University in collaboration with the Royal College of Music, The Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.
11. According to Leonard Stein, Schoenberg was keen on book-binding, and his inventions included 12-tone tables made in the form of prayer wheels — and special gadgets for notation, such as 'stave rulers'. He even devised a traffic system (British Library Sound Archive, Compiled and presented by Hans Keller, 6 November 1965, Tape 939, Track 1). See also Newlin 1980: 349 and MacDonald 1976/1987: 92.
12. In a letter to Edgard Varèse on Oct. 23 1922, Schoenberg admonishes him sharply for having the effrontery to announce a performance of *Pierrot* without consulting him or giving details as to the number of rehearsals planned, and type of speaker engaged:– 'Have you any inkling of the difficulties of the style; of the declamation; of the tempi; of the dynamics and all that?' (Schoenberg 1962).
13. Praat was written by Paul Boersma and David Weenink Phonetic Sciences, University of Amsterdam, Spuistraat 210, 1012VT Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and is available from <http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>