MUS 219
Performance Project in 20th-Century Music

Arnold Schoenberg
PIERROT LUNAIRE

Rinde Eckert, director
Ruth Ochs, conductor

Lieve Hendren, voice
Robert Olson, voice
Bodo Buettner, piano
Megan McPhee, violin
Edward Skolnick, violin / viola
Francesca McNeely, cello
Han-wei Kantzer, cello
Jessica Anastasio, flute / piccolo

Monday, May 2, 2011
2:00PM
Mathey College Common Room
Princeton University
Part One

1. Moondrunk (Mondunken)
This movement begins with a repeated seven-note motif in the piano (G♯-E-C-D-B♭-C-A-G) which, when combined with the pizzicatos in the violin, form the background texture — perhaps the moonbeams — for the flute and voice. The text for the twenty-one movements was written in French by Albert Giraud and translated into German by Otto Erich Hartleben. In this movement, the image of the poet’s obsession with the moon expresses the half ironic, half intuitively conceived Romanticism that sets the stage for the rest of the work. (HK)

2. Columbine
The second movement of Pierrot Lunaire, “Columbine,” is named for the female stock character in the commedia dell’arte tradition, who is the unattainable object of Pierrot’s affection. The text and music communicate the beauty of this character and the intricacy of her relationship with Pierrot: the opening melody of the movement is a delicate, coquettish waltz and the text, with its emphasis on “moonlight’s pale blossom” and Pierrot’s “troubled sorrow” and “yearnings,” illustrates Columbine’s unreachable beauty and Pierrot’s unrequited love for her. (MM)

3. The Dandy (Der Dandy)
Now described by the narrator, Pierrot prepares himself for the commedia dell’arte by fully embracing the moonbeam. Exploiting the high registers of the piccolo, clarinet, and voice, the music describes the cold, metallic colors mentioned in the poem. An association between nostalgia, homesickness, and tonal harmonic elements is made as the music incorporates stable intervals of major sixths and perfect fourths as the narrator mentions Pierrot’s ancestral home, the Italian city of Bergamo. (EK)

4. A Pale Laundry Maid (Eine blasse Wäscherin)
With “A Pale Laundry Maid,” Schoenberg paints a picture of a laundry maid hanging out her linens in the light of the night. The text, which pairs the pure whiteness of the linens with the pale maid’s skin, is accompanied by a cool, calm score. (RO)

5. Valse de Chopin
“Valse de Chopin” is probably the most blatantly satirical song of Pierrot Lunaire. In three-four meter with a distinct feel in one, the song is relatively slow, too slow to dance a waltz comfortably. Its plodding, heavy character undermines an elegant 19th-century waltz, although the instrumental parts play off each other with light, playful turns, small swells, and bouncing notes. However, this musical waltz is more lighthearted than the poem to which it is set, which repeats the image of a pale drop of blood that stains a sick woman’s lips. The poem contains opposing physical symptoms, like a Petrarchan sonnet or a Greek lyric poem, as the speaker is at once set aflame with pleasure and chilled by cold sickness, driven crazy by the repetitive, disturbing waltz. (JA)

6. Madonna
This movement alternates between Christian imagery of the Madonna, “mother of all sorrows,” and pagan references — “rise... on the altar of my versets.” The ultra-rhythmic and mechanical cello line throughout the first half offers an apathetic commentary on the lyrics describing the most pitiful of scenes: a desperate, wounded mother. The tension between the words and the music finally finds some release in the fortissimo outburst at the end of the movement, and seems to suggest a rejection of the first half’s apathy. (HK)

7. “The Sick Moon” (“Der Kranke Mond”)
“The Sick Moon” is set for flute and voice alone, a stark and cold arrangement that emphasizes long, slowly winding phrases and chromatic intervals. The two voices at times line up, and at others diverge, a reminder of the moon’s isolation as well as the importance of Pierrot’s psychic and emotional connection to the moon. The music is melancholic and introspective. The speaker addresses the moon, comparing it to a strange melody that has a captivating, gloomy power. Like the speaker, the moon is dying of an illness, perhaps a kind of boredom, perhaps love sickness. The flute part from “The Sick Moon” recurs in the slow section of movement 13, “Entwirfungen.” (JA)
Part Two

8. Night (Nacht)
The image of "dark, black, giant moths" may not be terribly frightening for all members of the audience at first, but after listening to movement "Night," virtually anyone is liable to walk away scared. And if one listening is not enough to give you the jitters, we will gladly play this haunting movement for you a second time. This movement is scored for bass clarinet, cello, and piano with voice and it begins the second part of Pierrot Lunaire with terrifying imagery that provokes more than one of the senses. (ES)

9. Prayer to Pierrot (Gebet an Pierrot)
With just clarinet, voice, and piano participating, this song is one of the very delicate movements, with hushed dynamics throughout except for one forte measure near the end. The phrasing is often short and abrupt, thus constantly reinventing the musical line by alternating texture between lyrical singing and percussive, rhythmic declamation. The lyrics stand in interesting ironic friction with the title, as the lyrical "I" first announces her loss of laughter in declarative tones. Only close to the end the demand is finally expressed: to give her back her laughter, with laughter characterized as the 'horse doctor, or veterinarian, of the soul. (BB)

10. Theft (Raub)
In "Theft," we begin to feel a transition from the unassuming innocence of the introductory pieces, and are introduced to a hasty, more frantic idiom. The text, which describes a group of robbers breaking into coffins at night in an attempt to steal precious jewels, is set to a vocal line which is constantly on-edge. By the end, the glimmer of the rubies has been supplanted by the glaring eyes of the corpses residing in the tomb. (RO)

11. Red Mass (Rote Messe)
"Red Mass" makes use of powerful imagery in both the text and music, with several instances of word painting. For example, Schoenberg used the rolled r in "zerreißt" (ripped) to illustrate the imagery of Pierrot ripping the priest’s vestments and a subito piano on "Blendenblitz der Götter" (mark-gleam of gold). This intensifies the poetry which itself relies on the visual elements associated with the ritual of Holy Communion. (LH)

12. Gallows Song (Galgenlied)
Gallows Song is a frantically short piece, which tells of a "scraggly harlot" being the final lover of a man who is destined to be hanged. The piece continues the more dark, sinister tone of the middle section. The string lines are quite agitated, as is the vocal line, and the shriek of the piccolo at the very end gives a chilling finality to the condemnation. (RO)

13. Beheading (Enthauptung)
Perhaps the most graphic movement in Pierrot Lunaire, "Beheading" further develops the overriding theme of the moon, this time in a menacing depiction of impending decapitation. Relying heavily on the low registers, this movement is written for bass clarinet, viola, cello, and piano with voice. The transition that follows is the closest that Pierrot Lunaire comes to conventional tonality, with the flute replacing the clarinet as the leading line. This quartet of flute, viola, cello, and bass clarinet give both the singer and the pianist a brief respite to recover from the violence of the beheading. (ES)

14. The Crosses (Die Krüze)
This song is probably the most shocking one in the cycle, in terms of sheer volume, choice of timbre, and of subject matter. The poet is bleeding – silently – in engagement with the his verses, with verses being equated to holy crosses. Thus the poet, quite literally, is crucified; he is hung up and nailed to his own verses. The mob walks away, the poet’s curls solidify (an association with the Christ figure now is almost inescapable), and the sun sets. This song disturbingly ends the second part of Pierrot Lunaire but does hint at a resurrection - eventually the poet has to come back home. (BB)
Part Three

15. Nostalgia
As the first piece in the last set of seven movements in Pierrot Lunaire, “Nostalgia” demonstrates a notable change in character from the preceding movements. It marks the beginning of a transformation from the violence of the second section, evident in “Gallows Song” and “Beheading,” to a series of closing movements that embody, in both music and text, a greater sense of childlike innocence. The movement’s text begins with “Sweet lamenting, like a crystal sighing/Out of the old Italian pantomime/Speaks of how wooden, modern, sentimental/Pierrot has become,” and connects the past with the present. It is paired with a wistful melody in the violin that is later repeated by the voice, seeming to demarcate the beginning of the end. (MM)

16. Vulgarity (Gemeinheit)
In “Vulgarity” the poet depicts the repulsive story of Pierrot, drill in hand, boring into Cassander’s skull. Through the orifice, Pierrot then stuffs and puffs “genuine Turkish tobacco.” The gruesome text is matched by music linked to both characters. Jarring harmonies and punctuating rhythms, perhaps Cassander’s screams, are swept aside by Pierrot’s sinister playfulness during the episode. (RAO)

17. Parody (Parodie)
The feature of this movement is the close imitation between the voice and the viola, and their clear melodic rifts. Imitation is not used in a classical sense, rather it is manipulated to achieve a nuanced sense of musical parody. This mimics the sense of parody in the text, as the moon mocks the knitting woman, and the poet mocks the stereotypical young lovers in commedia dell’arte, choosing to make this maiden-character an old woman. (LH)

18. The Moonfleck (Der Mondfleck)
The structural intimacy of “The Moonfleck” exemplifies how the true genius of Schoenberg may not always be evident upon first hearing—or even the first playing as a performer. Only nineteen measures in length, this movement is simultaneously a fugue (between clarinet and flute) and a canon (between violin and cello) that is also embedded within a larger palindrome: a structure that reads the same forwards as it does backwards. The turning point of the palindrome occurs right at the moment when Pierrot discovers the bothersome speck of moonlight on his back. Visibly he attempts to rub it off as he walks away, not realizing the trick that is being played upon him by the ever-present moon. (FM)

19. Serenade
The real irony of this movement begins with Schoenberg’s choice of instrumentation: though the singer describes Pierrot “scrapping” on his viola, the piece is primarily arranged for cello. The composer takes advantage of this larger instrument so as to thoroughly manipulate the music across the cello’s more extensive physical range. This technical awkwardness and difficulty indeed feels like “scrapping” with a “grotesque giant bow,” undermining any element of this virtuosic movement that would make one think of a typical, simple, and beautiful “Serenade.” (FM)

20. Journey Home (Heimfahrt)
The penultimate movement is, as noted by Schoenberg in the score, a barcarole, a traditional folk song sung by Venetian gondoliers. Keeping with tradition, this barcarole is also in the 6/8 meter and the music clearly paints the gentle waves described in the poem. As before, the music’s greater tonality and interlaced stability reflect the poet’s nostalgia and homesickness, all of which appropriately leads without pause into the final movement. (LK)

21. O Ancient Seat (O alter Dul)
As the conclusion of the work, No. 21 brings a great sense of closure to the piece. Earlier in the work Schoenberg took us out of the realm of tonality, but now he returns it, offering a hint of lyrical, tonality-influenced melodic line in the voice and piano. The musical sense of homecoming is paralleled in the poetry. Both the listener and Pierrot have changed over the course of the Pierrot Lunaire cycle. Just as Pierrot made his journey away from his stereotypical commedia dell’arte character, returning to commedia dell’arte in the third section with a sense of modern irony, the listener made a journey through Schoenberg’s various approaches to atonality, and now is returning home to a piece which often seems both tonal and atonal. (LH)