ARNOLD SCHOENBERG'S PIERROT LUNAIRE
A CENTENNIAL EXHIBIT

Arnold Schoenberg’s Pierrot lunaire turns 100 this year, and audiences are rediscovering the dark, playful, and satirical world of one of the most important and influential pieces of the twentieth century.

Part of the turn-of-the-century craze for the Commedia dell’Arte puppet-show characters, Pierrot lunaire draws on an extraordinary range of elements including cabaret, Symbolist poetry, ideas of Decadence and Degeneracy, Expressionism, the psychological discourse on hysteria, and musical allusions to Mendelssohn, Chopin, Brahms, Wagner, and Johann Strauss, Jr.

The first half of the exhibit traces the origins of the piece, beginning with the commission in 1912 by the singing actress Albertine Zehme for a setting of Albert Giraud’s poetic cycle Pierrot lunaire: rondels bergamasques. Schoenberg (1874-1951), using German translations by Otto Erich Hartleben, composed Pierrot in Berlin in the spring and summer of that same year; a highly-publicized concert tour followed in the autumn.

The second part of the exhibit, mirroring the tripartite structure and mood of Schoenberg’s work, is organized into three sections: Moondrunk Madness, Transgression, and Transcendence. To provide a sense of the vast emotional and expressive range of the composition, each section focuses on a different movement from the work, accompanied by self-portraits of Schoenberg (who was also an amateur painter), along with representations of Pierrot in artworks, advertising, and popular culture.

Along with its innovative – and now widely-used – small mixed instrumental ensemble, Pierrot is famous for its distinctive partly-sung, partly-spoken vocal style called Sprechstimme. Through a remarkable synthesis of all these elements, Schoenberg was able to give voice to Pierrot’s ecstatic, deranged, and inspired psyche.

We invite you to a performance of Pierrot lunaire and related works on Thursday, April 5th at 8:00pm in Distler Performance Hall. Performers include Susan Narucki, soprano; Joanna Kurkowicz, violin and viola; Emmanuel Feldman, cello; Sarah Brady, flutes; Diane Heffner, clarinets; and Donald Berman, piano.

The Pierrot Project was organized by Professors Joseph Auner and Donald Berman with support from the Tufts Music Department and the Granoff Music Fund. Visit the Pierrot Project online at http://as.tufts.edu/music/musiccenter/events/PierrotProject.htm.

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