

## PART II

### From song to opera



## 4 Early works: tonality and beyond

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### First songs and instrumental music

Berg's dozen or so 'official' compositions, from the Piano Sonata Op. 1 through to the Violin Concerto he composed more than a quarter of a century later, are many times outnumbered by the songs he wrote between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three. Only eight of these were published during Berg's lifetime – the 1907 setting of Theodor Storm's 'Schliesse mir die Augen beide' and the selection of *Seven Early Songs* that Berg revised and orchestrated in 1928 – though one more was made available by Willi Reich shortly after the composer's death.<sup>1</sup> The publication of two volumes of *Jugendlieder* in 1985 changed the picture entirely: it meant that roughly two-thirds of the approximately eighty-five early songs were available in published form; within a short while the same could be said of a significant proportion of the piano music Berg wrote in his early twenties. Between them, and almost exclusively, these two genres – solo song and piano music – carried him from his first teenage efforts as a composer through to atonality in the manner of Schoenberg.

One of the most striking features of this development is the disparity of Berg's achievement in the two genres. In a famous and characteristic letter written in 1910, Schoenberg described the situation without mercy:

Alban Berg ... is an extraordinarily gifted composer. But the state he was in when he came to me was such that his imagination apparently could not work on anything but *Lieder*. Even the piano accompaniments to them were song-like in style. He was absolutely incapable of writing an instrumental movement or inventing an instrumental theme. You can hardly imagine the lengths I went to in order to remove this defect in his talent.<sup>2</sup>

Schoenberg's criticisms were reasonable enough. There is no doubt that even among Berg's earliest songs there are several that possess great charm and show an apparently effortless facility for the synthesis of words and music that was one goal of the Romantic *Lied*. They also show an ability to pick up idioms we now associate with Schumann, Mahler and Wolf with-

out resorting to slavish imitation. In contrast, the piano pieces he wrote a few years later as exercises for Schoenberg, culminating in the Twelve Variations on an original theme (1908), are accomplished rather than distinguished and would be of little artistic interest were they not by Alban Berg.

Berg's first songs date from 1901. Composing them seems to have been just one expression of a self-consciously artistic sensibility which developed rapidly under the perhaps unlikely mentorship of the architect Hermann Watznauer (1875–1939), a friend of the Berg family since 1898.<sup>3</sup> Through Watznauer's later biography of the composer, which was checked by Berg himself and seems generally reliable as far as c. 1907, we know much of the chronology of the early songs up to this time, and in particular we know which of them were shown to Arnold Schoenberg in October 1904 as examples of Berg's recent work.<sup>4</sup> These songs, which led Schoenberg to accept the nineteen-year-old Berg as a pupil without charge, were 'Liebe', 'Wandert, ihr Wolken', 'Im Morgengrauen', 'Grabschrift' and 'Traum', the last two being dated 16 August 1904.<sup>5</sup> The very opening of 'Liebe' is impressive in its handling of the complexities of post-Wagnerian tonal harmony on a small scale (Example 4.1). Most of the chords, considered as individual sonorities, have the quality of dominant or half-diminished sevenths: Berg is adept at linking these by chromatic voice-leading, and occasionally through root motion through a tritone (see bars 1–2, 4–5). Tonally functional progressions – marked with brackets below Example 4.1 – are not employed as a matter of routine but rather *deployed* from time to time, their qualitative difference from the chromatic progressions being held in balance by the composer as one aspect of the musical expression. 'Grabschrift' is perhaps the most remarkable of these songs, not least in that the music achieves tonal focus only in its third bar. Berg's writing for both performers encompasses a broad range of figuration, the vocal line taking in both stark declamation and animated sequence, the piano writing moving from bare chromaticism in the manner of late Liszt, by way of routine chordal accompaniment, to the middle section's florid arpeggio writing. The overall sense of tonal direction is hair-raising rather than secure, however, and the fact that the song ends by recapitulating the music of the opening a semitone higher seems scarcely calculated.

Nonetheless, these songs represent a level of achievement that might make one question why Schoenberg did not at first regard Berg as a student of composition *per se*: instead, he was to take instruction in harmony and counterpoint for three years. If the reason for this was to do with the shortcomings Schoenberg later described, then it must be said that his claim that 'even [Berg's] piano accompaniments ... were song-like in style' is something of an exaggeration. Some of Berg's earliest piano writing is

## Example 4.1 'Liebe' (1904, wds. Rainer Maria Rilke), bars 1–7

Und wie mag der Lie - be dir kom - men sein?

Kam sie wie ein Son - nen, ein Blü - ten - schein? Kam sie

indeed awkward, but many of the textures he employs in the untutored songs are adapted from his likely models, and most – probably all – of his accompaniments were written for actual performance, frequently by the composer himself. But what is missing from these songs, at least by comparison with those that we must take to embody the fruits of Schoenberg's teaching, is an element of musical concentration and coherence which can be put down, in the broadest terms, to the constant re-use of musical material.

In the later works this shows itself variously. Firstly, in the use of motives: whether to generate the phrases of a melodic line, to link it with the music of the piano, or to bind together the texture of the piano writing itself through internal counterpoint. Secondly, in a heightened articulation of musical form, brought about during the course of a song both through carefully placed allusions to earlier moments and through the varied reprise of more extended passages. By mid-1908 these were aspects of compositional technique which Berg had mastered, at least in the field of song-writing. Even 'Die Nachtigall', written as early as the spring of

1907 and later chosen by the composer for publication as one of the *Seven Early Songs*,<sup>6</sup> demonstrates such skills in the flowing, motivically saturated piano writing of the outer sections and the manner in which its motive forms the basis of the ever more prominent anacrusis in the vocal line. And all of this is done without a loss of immediacy or charm – qualities which the song possesses in abundance.

Yet, as he wrote this song, Berg was but a student of harmony and counterpoint. It is much to Schoenberg's credit that whilst taking Berg through the fundamentals of the composer's craft, he nonetheless allowed his student to continue writing songs for pleasure. Indeed, he must have taken a professional interest in them as well, since three songs, 'Die Nachtigall' among them, together with an evidently ambitious double fugue for string quintet with piano, comprised Berg's contribution to the concert of music by Schoenberg's pupils that took place in Vienna on 7 November 1907.<sup>7</sup> Schoenberg thought highly of the fugue, at least within its pedagogical context:

I could do counterpoint with [Berg] in a manner rare amongst my pupils. [The] double fugue for string quintet ... was overflowing with ingenuities. But I could see already to what lengths he could be pushed: when the fugue was ready I told him to add a piano accompaniment in the manner of a continuo. Not only did he execute this with all excellence, he found ways of adding a further host of minor devilries.<sup>8</sup>

This was the culmination of Berg's work as a counterpoint student. The academic session that began in the autumn of 1907 saw him transfer to 'free composition'.

To start with, Berg was engaged on various short pieces mainly for piano, and these in due course led to a piano variations project which came to fruition in the summer of 1908 with the Twelve Variations on an original theme. There is much to admire in this music, which specifically recalls the Beethoven of the Diabelli Variations but adds many Brahmsian turns of phrase; indeed the layout of Berg's theme, and its unassuming nature, seem to have been designed to offer opportunities similar to those Beethoven found in the musical substance he extracted from Diabelli's 'cobble's patch'. Berg's work is not on the same scale, and it almost totally lacks the cumulative sense of form across the variations which is one of the seminal achievements of Beethoven's towering masterpiece; but at a bar-by-bar level his technical accomplishment in following an established path stands up to comparison with variation sets by Beethoven's nineteenth-century successors surprisingly well.

Simply on account of their lack of individuality, however, the Twelve

Variations are quite limited in conception compared with the songs that Berg was writing at this time: ‘Nacht’ and ‘Schilflied’ (*Seven Early Songs*, nos. 1 and 2), ‘Das stille Königreich’ and ‘Leukon’ (*Jugendlieder*, Vol. II nos. 22 and 23). At least the first two of these are fully worthy of their place in the concert repertoire alongside songs by Berg’s older contemporaries, whereas for all their accomplishment the piano variations are, by the very highest standards, no more than a curiosity. ‘Nacht’ is notable for its extensive use of the whole-tone scale, with which Berg was familiar from Schoenberg’s Chamber Symphony No. 1 (1906) and more recently from Paul Dukas’s opera *Ariane et Barbe-bleue*, which had impressed him at the Vienna Volksoper on 2 April 1908. Although the pure whole-tone character of the song’s opening material perhaps makes this aspect over-prominent, Berg demonstrates a remarkable ability to move convincingly between such whole-tone writing and the other elements of his harmonic repertoire. The song also shows the art-that-conceals-art in Berg’s control over its tonal direction, the key signature of A major being justified by two well-prepared climactic moments clearly focused on that key (bars 9 and 16) despite both the music’s perpetual tendency to move flatwards – chords rooted on F, B $\flat$  and E $\flat$  are numerous – and the key-evading whole-tone sonorities that saturate the opening, the principal reprise at bar 26, and the concluding bars.

But, even more so than in the case of ‘Die Nachtigall’, a large part of what makes ‘Nacht’ and ‘Schilflied’ so impressive as music is their constant recycling and recombination of material to create a fully woven musical texture rather than simply a string of ideas. This was undoubtedly something that had come from Schoenberg’s tuition in instrumental genres. After all, the very *raison d’être* of fugue and variation movements is their re-use of material. Even the counterexample of ‘Das stille Königreich’, described with some justification by Nicholas Chadwick in his pioneering study as ‘far and away the most interesting of all Berg’s [then] unpublished songs’, is instructive.<sup>9</sup> Whilst, on the page, the song’s principal motive and its treatment bear a close resemblance to the corresponding features of the slightly later ‘Sommertage’ (*Seven Early Songs*, no. 7), the song never takes wing as ‘Sommertage’ does. ‘Leukon’ is also only partly successful – its motivic material too bland to make anything of Gleim’s poem. But all of these songs, embodying the young composer’s sophisticated and far from uncritical literary tastes, and responding in their momentary musical gestures to the inflections of the texts he chose, retain that innate strength of purpose that Schoenberg saw even in Berg’s untutored work, and it is this which distinguishes even the less successful of them from the Twelve Variations.

## Piano Sonata Op. 1

The Piano Sonata Op. 1 is the first of Berg's completed instrumental compositions in which the debt is reversed. For the Sonata undoubtedly builds on the musical achievement of the songs as well as on the technical benefits Berg had taken from Schoenberg in the instrumental sphere. In fact, there was more than one sonata: five numbered sonatas preceded Op. 1, all of them similarly in one movement, though none was completed. The piano sonata 'project', if we may characterise it so, seems to have occupied Berg under Schoenberg's tuition during the 1908–9 season,<sup>10</sup> and it is in this sense that the Op. 1 Sonata may be said to date from 1908, the date which Reich gives in his authorised biography.<sup>11</sup> Even the fifth of the preliminary sonatas would appear to have been composed rather later than this, however, since in Berg's working manuscript it is interrupted by a draft of the second song from his Op. 2.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the strongest circumstantial evidence that Op. 1 itself was not composed until the latter part of the season is that the Twelve Variations were chosen for performance in another concert of music by Schoenberg's pupils which took place on 8 November 1908 – a choice which, as George Perle has noted, would have been musically inexplicable had the Piano Sonata already been available at that time.<sup>13</sup>

The preliminary sonatas may have been conceived as exercises in writing different sections of a sonata form, though each begins at the beginning of the movement.<sup>14</sup> Of these, Nos. 3, 4 and 5 are particularly noteworthy. The opening dotted rhythm of No. 3 and its application to a leaping motivic shape clearly prepare the ground for Op. 1, whilst both the rising figure that follows and the counterpoint that develops it anticipate the opening of the song 'Nun ich der Riesen stärksten überwand', Op. 2/iii. The first eight bars of No. 4 were to be famously re-used some years later by Berg in the D minor interlude from Act III of *Wozzeck*;<sup>15</sup> but of more immediate chronological relevance is that this sonata, too, anticipates the third song of Op. 2 – even if its relation to the song's middle section is less substantial than is the relation of the third sonata to the same song's outer sections. The fifth and last of the preliminary sonatas, which resembles Op. 1 closely in several of its turns of phrase, is by far the longest and could probably be 'completed' without too much difficulty, but the attractiveness of this prospect is reduced by the meandering way in which the material is developed, making even the unfinished work seem over-extended by comparison with the definitive Sonata that was to follow.

Indeed, one of the principal characteristics of the Op. 1 Sonata is its tautness. Its one-movement format does not seek ambitiously to incorporate aspects of scherzo, slow movement and finale genres – bundling the



four movements of a sonata design into the span of a single sonata-form – as had been one aim of Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 1 (1905) and first Chamber Symphony. At the same time, Berg's (and his teacher's) decision to let the single sonata-form movement of Op. 1 stand alone as a complete work reflects the devaluation of the other movement-types that was implicit in Schoenberg's project. The mundane explanation for this, according to Josef Polnauer (1888–1969), who studied with Schoenberg from 1909 to 1911 and thereafter with Berg for two years, was that Berg had originally planned a slow movement and finale to follow the sonata-form movement, but nothing suitable for these movements came to him. Seeking Schoenberg's advice, Berg was told 'Well, then, you've simply said all you had to say', and so decided to let the single movement stand alone.<sup>16</sup>

The course of the Sonata is articulated through the interaction between, on the one hand, the ongoing development of its motivic material and, on the other hand, the basis of its Brahmsian sonata-design in stable, contrasting thematic areas. The technique that allowed Berg to square this circle was that of *developing variation*, a compositional principle which Schoenberg was not yet ready to elaborate formally in his writings but which he surely imparted verbally to his pupils. All the same, Berg's Sonata must be counted a more thoroughgoing instance of developing variation than, say, Schoenberg's first Chamber Symphony, which is frequently cited as a model for the Sonata in other respects.<sup>17</sup>

The music begins in mid-flow, harmonically speaking (Example 4.2a): its cadential trajectory to the tonic gives bars 1–4 clear identity as a musical phrase and emblematic status as a source of motivic material, which is immediately taken up in a counterpoint of fragments. Through this, the characteristic shapes and rhythms established at *a*, *b* and *c* in the opening phrase are combined and recombined, and in the process adapted almost imperceptibly, until they are realigned in a newly thematic presentation (bars 12–14, Example 4.2b). This in turn is taken up and varied, the metamorphosis of motivic shapes eliding neatly into a re-presentation of the opening theme (bars 17–19). Whether this theme is now heard as a repetition that begins a larger formal unit, or as a step in a journey of transformation which is free to turn back on itself and so traverse the same material in different ways, is one of the games which this work plays: it becomes an issue at precisely this juncture, as noted by Adorno in his richly argued analysis of the movement, in which he suggests that 'transition and principal theme are combined in such a way that in retrospect the theme assumes a tripartite form'.<sup>18</sup> Adorno argues, in other words, that the music of bars 12ff. seems at first to be transitional, and then not to be.

At the root of this is the perceptibility of a distinction – even as the combination and recombination of materials proceeds in all its fluidity –

Example 4.2 (a) Piano Sonata Op. 1, opening (*Mäßig bewegt*), showing motives *a*, *b* and *c*

The musical score shows the opening of the Piano Sonata Op. 1 in 3/4 time, key of D major. It is divided into three sections: *a*, *b*, and *c*. Section *a* (bars 1-4) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Section *b* (bars 5-8) is marked *accel.* (accelerando). Section *c* (bars 9-11) is marked *rit.* (ritardando). The score features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes in the right hand, with a more rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.

(b) bars 12–14 (*Rascher als Tempo I*)

This section of the score (bars 12-14) is marked *Rascher als Tempo I* (Faster than Tempo I). It features a more complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo) and *p* (piano). The right hand has a more active melodic line, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment.

between a sense at some moments of thematic delineation, and at other moments of transitional motivic working. In the hands of many performers this distinction will perhaps rightly remain a subtle one, though the establishment of a play of ideas at the broader formal level depends on it. Janet Schmalfeldt, in an analysis even more comprehensive than Adorno's, concurs with and clarifies his view, labelling bars 12ff. as a 'false transition' which 'becomes' the B-section of the main theme. Later in the movement, however, their analyses diverge: indeed a comparison among various commentators is instructive, revealing extensive similarities in their perceptions but also subtle differences between them (Table 4.1). The nearest thing we have to Berg's own opinion is embodied in his tempo markings, which distinguish the thematic areas with great clarity. Interestingly in view of our knowledge of his later music, the succession of tempos traces a wedge-shape, in which gradually increasing speeds alternate with gradually decreasing ones.<sup>19</sup> As a number of commentators have observed, wedge-configurations of pitch are a characteristic feature of Berg's music from at least as early as the *Altenberg Lieder* Op. 4;<sup>20</sup> a tempo wedge similar to that of the Piano Sonata's exposition but on a far larger scale is seen across the six movements of the *Lyric Suite*.

As Bruce Archibald has pointed out, the development and recapitulation of the Piano Sonata fall, like the exposition, into three sections of which the third is in each case the shortest.<sup>21</sup> An important difference, however, is that the development reworks the material of bars 12ff. quite extensively (bars 71–100), whereas the subsidiary themes from bars 30ff.

Table 4.1 Op. 1: Berg's tempo markings for exposition, cf. formal analyses

bar	Berg	Adorno	Redlich	Jarman	Schmalfeldt
1	Mäßig bewegt	MT (antecedent)	A I	S I/i	MT (A)
4	a tempo	MT (consequent)		variant	
12	Rascher als Tempo I	transition? (or MT, third part)	A II	S I/ii	false transition, becomes MT (B)
17	Tempo I	[transition]			MT (A'), becomes transition
30	Langsamer als Tempo I	ST	B I	S II/i	ST 1 (= A)
39	Rasch	CT	B II	S II/ii	ST 2 (= B)
50	Viel langsamer (Quasi Adagio)	<i>Abgesang</i>	C	codetta	CT (= A')

Note: MT = main theme; ST = secondary or subordinate theme; CT = closing theme.

Sources: Adorno, *Alban Berg*, pp. 42–5; Redlich, *Alban Berg: Versuch einer Würdigung*, pp. 60–61; Jarman, *The Music of Alban Berg*, pp. 31–2; Schmalfeldt, 'Berg's Path to Atonality', pp. 86–9.

and 39ff. are treated briefly in tandem leading back to the recapitulation of the main theme (bars 101–11). The *Abgesang* material – if we accept Adorno's designation – is thus held over until the recapitulation, where it brings the Sonata to a close with the movement's most distant recollection, underlining the nostalgic sense of the whole work. This lingering impression is actually enhanced by the absence of any following movements: the expression of nostalgia's sense of loss thus plays in part upon our understanding of music's formal and generic conventions, in a way that was to become characteristically Bergian.

Looking more closely at the subsidiary and *Abgesang* themes, one of the most striking features on the page is the close relationship between the material of bars 39ff. and bars 50ff. (Example 4.3a). Their identical pitch sequence is, however, heard with two quite different characters, delineated largely through contrasts of rhythm and tempo. This coincidence of material is indicative of Berg's confidence in his ability to articulate similarity into difference. A smaller, more subtle and yet also more outrageous example is to be found at the recapitulation of the subsidiary theme (bar 138), where simply by taking a different note from the B<sup>9</sup> harmony at the start (C<sup>#</sup>, before reverting to F<sup>#</sup>) Berg exposes a connection, at the interval of a tritone, between the head-motives of the principal and subsidiary themes (Example 4.3b). Exchanging the earlier dotted rhythm for even quavers at this point makes the connection less triumphantly obvious, whilst at the same time matching precisely the way the principal theme has been presented at its own recapitulation (bar 111) – at which juncture the change of rhythm is bound to have seemed motivated only by a desire for variety, now transformed into a tight and unexpected coherence.

Example 4.3 (a) Op. 1: bar 39 (*Rasch*); bars 50–51 (*Viel langsamer*)

(b) recapitulation of themes: bars 138–9 (*Langsames Tempo*); bar 111 (*Tempo I*)

### Aspects of the musical language

The bar-by-bar musical language of the Piano Sonata has been discussed at length – in different ways and half a century apart, but with remarkable points of contact – by Adorno and Schmalfeldt. Adorno identifies the re-ordering of notes within a motive, and their vertical accumulation into harmonic sonorities, as two characteristic ways in which Berg treats small fragments of material, suggesting that:

[it] is extremely typical of the Sonata [that motives are] restated in a manner midway between literal and ‘retrograde’ repetition, which one might call ‘axis rotation’; the terse intervals are retained but their succession is altered; [at bar 6] the three-note motive [a] begins with the second note, after which comes the first and then the third. Axis rotation is employed so consistently within the Sonata that it does not take much interpretive skill to see it as a prototype for the later serial technique; the motive is treated in the sense of a ‘basic idea’ [*Grundgestalt*]

[at the end of the work] the *Abgesang* ... clearly exhibits an inclination to present the melodic intervals of the head motive simultaneously as a sonority.<sup>22</sup>

Schmalfeldt takes these ideas further with the supporting conceptual apparatus of pitch-class set theory: she shows in considerable detail that small configurations of pitches, at first presented motivically in the way we have seen, may also be regarded as unordered sets – which is to say, they can be found to reappear (often transposed and perhaps also inverted) with the notes in a different linear order, or indeed vertically as a chord

rather than linearly at all. Like Adorno, though without his somewhat premature invocation of serial technique, Schmalfeldt uses this line of argument to link the Sonata with Berg's later compositions, specifically with the String Quartet Op. 3, the clarinet pieces Op. 5 and *Wozzeck*.

Indeed, looking more broadly than just at the Sonata, Berg's music is potentially fertile ground on which to develop a sophisticated counter to the perhaps hastily perceived demarcation between tonal and atonal music which generated such a flurry of both learned polemic and popular misunderstanding through much of the twentieth century. One of the most powerful ideas put forward with this in mind is Mark DeVoto's principle of 'creeping chromaticism' – something which he sees operating in Berg's music from the early songs at least as far as *Wozzeck*.<sup>23</sup> 'Creeping' is an informally descriptive term which is applicable in many musical situations – DeVoto offers examples from Chopin, Schumann, Brahms and a turn-of-the-century popular song as precedents for Schoenberg and Berg – where chords from a rich harmonic vocabulary seem to be linked in sequence more by the chromatic motion of prominent voices, such as the melody and the bass, than by concepts of root progression. The previous norms of root progression through tonic, dominant and subdominant functions are in any case frequently undermined in late nineteenth-century music, both by the possibility of enharmonic notation obscuring the generative origins of chromaticised chords, and by the versatility of composers in expanding the range of root progressions they could handle convincingly. In Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre* – the 'harmony course' which Berg in effect worked through, prior to its publication, as one of Schoenberg's harmony students – many exercises are devoted to developing a wide-ranging facility in connecting one chord with another: some of the most advanced of these are concerned with 'connections of altered and vagrant chords' (i.e. chromaticised and functionally ambivalent chords) and 'triads connected with all other triads and seventh chords; also, all seventh chords with one another'.<sup>24</sup> Introducing the first of these sections of the book, Schoenberg gives some advice to the student reader:

[Since] close attention to ... the root progressions often does not assure control over the quality of a progression, control through the voice leading may be substituted ... Thus, in general, the best connections of simple chords with vagrants or of vagrant chords with one another will be those in which the second chord contains, as far as possible, only notes that appeared in the first or are recognisable as chromatically raised or lowered notes of the first. In his first attempts the pupil should make this origin explicit in the voice leading. An E $\flat$  in the second chord should actually appear in the same voice that in the first chord had the E, from which the E $\flat$  came. ... Later, when he is familiar with the functioning of

these phenomena, the pupil may abandon this deliberate expression of the derivation in the voice leading.<sup>25</sup>

This comes close to recommending DeVoto's 'chromatic creeping' as a rule of thumb for the pupil's 'first attempts' – perhaps serving to remind us that Berg's Sonata is still a student work.

Schoenberg also makes it clear that such chords may be handled simply with reference to their own internal construction and characteristic sonorities:

the pupil will best take all these vagrant chords for what they are, without tracing them back to a key or degree ... [Once] we abandon the desire to explain the derivation of these chords, their effect becomes much clearer.<sup>26</sup>

This concentration on the thing-in-itself is a crucial conceptual step towards recognising even such entities as the whole-tone scale and quartal harmonies (chords built in fourths) as objects to be manipulated in their own right, rather than as interesting end-points of a process of chromatic alteration from conventional chords or scales. But in fact Schoenberg has it both ways: by charting connecting progressions between vagrant chords on the basis of conceiving them as chromatically altered functional chords – which is what he does in the *Harmonielehre* – he allowed both himself (notably in the first Chamber Symphony) and the more gifted of his pupils (notably Berg) to contextualise these new musical artefacts in a richly expanded dialect of tonality. Berg was right at the centre of this: he prepared the index to the first edition of the *Harmonielehre* and seems to have received instruction of an intensity that Schoenberg did not match after its publication.<sup>27</sup>

Adorno chooses to pitch his discussion of how Berg connects quartal harmonies with their triadic surroundings at a different level, stressing that the manner of their contextualisation is historically and expressively charged. He compares Berg's handling of quartal harmonies with Schoenberg's in the Chamber Symphony:

Fourths opened the Chamber Symphony: chordal in the introduction, melodic in the principal theme. They are expounded abruptly, with all the confidence of conquest. In Berg's Sonata, on the other hand, they first appear in bar 26 in an harmonically formative role [see Example 4.4]. The quartal sonority F#–B–E is introduced in such a way that the critical note E appears as a suspension to D, that is, 'harmonically foreign' to the tonic chord of the principal key of B minor ... Imperceptibly, ... this quartal trichord gradually emancipates itself until finally revealed (bar 28) as a pure five-note quartal chord. However, with the help of a motivic remnant [a development of the 'axis-rotated' version of *b*]

Example 4.4 Op. 1: quartal harmonies in bars 26–9 (notation simplified)

The image shows a musical score for piano, consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef). The music is in G major. The score is annotated with upward-pointing arrows below the bass staff, indicating the progression of chords. The first arrow is labeled 'A: II' and the last is labeled 'V'. The music features complex, chromatically altered quartal harmonies, with some notes grouped by slurs and triplets. The notation is simplified, focusing on the essential harmonic structure.

this chord is slowly altered, note by note, until (bar 29) it is transformed ... into an altered dominant of A major. That is how the quartal formation, at its appearance and disappearance, dissolves seamlessly into the tonal flow. ... Schoenberg's discovery of quartal sonorities was utopian; Berg discovered them with memory's long, veiled gaze sunk deep into the past, that past which his music, even at its most daring, never forgets to consider.<sup>28</sup>

DeVoto also fastens on this passage of the Sonata, which, as Adorno's description makes clear, is a fine example of 'chromatic creeping'.<sup>29</sup>

But we can be more specific even than this. In the Chamber Symphony, Schoenberg uses quartal harmony not only to set the work on its exhilarating journey but also at formal junctures where, in a more conventionally tonal work, one might expect to find a lengthy prolongation of dominant-quality harmony, analogous (albeit in what is a considerably more elaborate formal design) to the retransition section of a sonata movement. In phenomenological terms, the effect is one of complementarity: a thematically empty prolongation of unresolved dominant-quality harmony is 'made good' by the appearance of a familiar theme played in the movement's most stable tonal area. Filling this kind of slot in a reinterpreted formal schema is a convenient way for quartal harmony to be deployed in the extended tonal style of early Schoenberg and Berg, for whereas tonally functional harmonies can be chromatically altered and contrapuntally obscured by thematic material and yet still be recognised, quartal harmonies once inflected by chromaticism simply lose their identity. In Berg's Sonata, the passage described by Adorno and DeVoto introduces the subsidiary theme in the exposition; there is a touch of quartal harmony in bar 11, just before the 'false transition' theme – which perhaps clarifies the status of this material, after all – and the *Abgesang* is preceded by a passage which features many quartal configurations. The section of the development which reworks the 'false transition' theme is heralded by a passage of

pure whole-tone writing – the connection being that, like the quartal chords, the whole-tone scale risks annihilation if chromatically inflected – and the development's reworking of the subsidiary material is preceded by the Sonata's largest climax, built on quartal harmonic foundations akin to those of bars 26–9 but much expanded.<sup>30</sup>

A noteworthy absentee from this list is the retransition itself, which is accomplished harmonically by stealth and thematically by anticipation. One may also point to the angular chromaticism of the sextuplet motive that cues the second subsidiary theme (bar 39) as another means of avoiding naive whole-tone or quartal writing in this work – even if the same pitch sequence, in its slower treatment as the *Abgesang*, is ultimately tamed by a chorale-like chromatic progression of whole-tone chords. This is very different to 'Nacht', with its prominent whole-tone thematic material and radiant bursts of A major, but then the *Lied* as a genre accommodates – demands, even – a more heterogeneous range of musical gesture and a lesser emphasis on balance or complementarity among its materials. Much of the younger Berg's accomplishment as a song composer can be put down to his ability to produce authentically *Lied*-like gestures, and much of the benefit of Schoenberg's teaching can be seen in Berg's new-found ability to mediate among different types of such material and to develop them by constant variation and recombination, whilst still retaining an ear for the expressive turn of phrase.

## Four Songs Op. 2

As the surviving manuscripts make clear, Berg continued to write songs while working on his sonata project. Just as serious work on the project seems to have begun only a little after the last of the *Jugendlieder* were composed (the two Hohenberg settings 'Sommertage' and 'Läuterung'), so a later phase of work on the fifth preliminary sonata was coeval with a draft of 'Schlafend trägt man mich', which became the second of the Four Songs Op. 2. Overall, the chronology of Op. 2 is a little clearer than that of the Piano Sonata. It seems that songs two and three were written before the others, to poems 56 and 57 from the collection *Der Glühende* by Alfred Mombert (1872–1942), followed by Op. 2/i, to a poem by the dramatist Friedrich Hebbel (1813–63), and finally by Op. 2/iv, also taken from Mombert's *Der Glühende*. Whereas the origins of songs two and three are roughly contemporary with Berg's work towards the sonata project, song one would seem to postdate the completion of Op. 1, whilst the fourth song was written later still, after the first movement of the String Quartet



Op. 3 had been drafted, early in 1910.<sup>31</sup> Both in their order of composition, then, and in their order of presentation in performance, the Four Songs traverse an apparent boundary between tonal and atonal music. This raises the question of their coherence as a group, which is something one might expect to locate in factors such as a narrative thread running through the substance and imagery of the poetry, large-scale tonal motion across several songs, or the use of shared motives between the songs. To this rather generalised checklist should be added the specific model of Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2 (1907–8), in which a stylistic journey across the four movements, from tonality into overt atonality, is articulated through the expression of soul-searching and then transcendence, in the two poems by Stefan George which a soprano soloist sings in the third and fourth movements.

In their published order, the poetry of Berg's Op. 2 songs begins with a yearning for total sleep;<sup>32</sup> it continues with an involuntary journey, still in sleep, 'to my homeland', which is explained further as a hero's fairytale return after overcoming 'the strongest of giants' in 'the darkest land'; and ends by presenting a dreamlike state which may or may not be death ('the one dies whilst the other lives: that makes the world so profoundly beautiful'). If already only a little imagination is required to interpret this as the allegorical expression of one who feels propelled by events, from a situation in which good work has been achieved but the task is now done, into a state through which he hopes to have achieved transcendence, then some incidental connections with Schoenberg's works on similar themes supply further correlation. The opening words of Berg's fourth song, 'Warm die Lüfte' ('warm [are] the breezes'), recall directly the soprano's opening words in the last movement of Schoenberg's second quartet: 'Ich fühle Luft von anderen Planeten' ('I feel [a] breath from other planets'); and the declamatory style of Berg's song has been likened by several commentators to that of Schoenberg's one-woman music-drama *Erwartung* ('Expectation', 1909), probably cued by the words 'Er kommt noch nicht. Er lässt mich warten' ('He still hasn't come. He's making me wait').<sup>33</sup>

In terms of tonal organisation, the two central songs are clearly linked. Song two ends with a dominant-quality sonority rooted on E $\flat$ , at the culmination of a progression around the circle of fifths: the third song opens in a fragmentary A $\flat$  minor, continuing the fifths and resolving the dominant harmony. When the third song ends, now firmly in E $\flat$  major, one may perceive a connection with both the beginning and the end of the preceding song. Had the fourth song been published a minor third higher than it was, it would have begun with the perfect fifth E $\flat$ –B $\flat$  in the bass, continuing forward from the second and third songs, and would have ended with a link back to the first song, which begins and ends firmly in D minor (see

## Example 4.5 (a) conjectural tonal framework of Op. 2 (song four transposed to Eb/D basis)

## (b) actual tonal framework of Op. 2 (as published)

Example 4.5a). Though one ought not to press speculation along such lines too far, not least because the vocal tessitura in bars iv/15–16 is already high and could hardly be transposed upwards, it is fair to suggest that this tonal scheme would have led to Op. 2/iv being perceived ever since as less thoroughly atonal than has been the case. And, setting aside speculation in favour of the true picture (Example 4.5b), what this sequence of observations achieves is to throw into relief the central section of song four, which is in fact a ‘song-within-a-song’. After the opening, rooted on the perfect fifth C–G, the voice announces ‘I will sing’ (bars iv/7–8), and proceeds to relate a crypto-erotic mountain pastoral image, using a musical style reminiscent of Schoenberg’s *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* (1908–9).<sup>34</sup> With the climactic ‘Stirb!’ (‘Die!’), the song-within-a-song comes to an abrupt end, and the music’s expanded tonal sense is regained through a quasi-functional succession of dominant thirteenth and augmented ninth chords similar to the harmony of much of the first song.

Consideration of the motivic connections within and between the songs demands closer analysis of each, which may be pursued according to the likely sequence of their composition. The music of Op. 2/iii may be described, on a bar-by-bar basis, in broadly the same terms as apply to the Piano Sonata, but with the proviso that in the more gestural genre of the *Lied* the motivic integration is less continuous: the whole effect is more volatile, in response to the text. Its two principal motives, shown as *a* and *b* in Example 4.6, thus serve not to generate an intricate web of musical material but to provide musical points of reference, to add variety to the

Example 4.6 Op. 2/iii: motives, harmonic framework and 'creeping' voices

The image displays a musical score for Example 4.6, Op. 2/iii, consisting of two systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (top staff) and a piano accompaniment (middle and bottom staves). Motive 'a' is marked in the first system, and motive 'b' is marked in the second system. Below the piano part of each system, there are harmonic reductions and fingering diagrams. The first system's harmonic framework includes chords:  $A\flat m: V^{\#3}$ ,  $I_4$ ,  $V^7$ ,  $I^6$ ,  $Dm: II_{\#3}^7$ ,  $V^9$ , and  $I^6$ . The second system's harmonic framework includes:  $Dm:$ ,  $I$ ,  $E\flat m: II^7$ ,  $N^7-V^9$ , and  $I_4$ . Fingering diagrams are provided for various chords, including (Fr6), (maj7), (Q6), (min7), and ( $\emptyset$ 7).

**System 1: Motive a**

Chords:  $A\flat m: V^{\#3}$   $I_4$   $V^7$   $I^6$   $Dm: II_{\#3}^7$   $V^9$   $I^6$

Fingering (Fr6): 10 — 7 — 3 — 1

Fingering (maj7): 11 — 8 — 5 — 4 — 3 — 2 — 1

**System 2: Motive b**

Chords:  $Dm:$   $I$   $E\flat m: II^7$   $N^7-V^9$   $I_4$

Fingering (Q6): 11 — 7 — (2) — (9) — (5) — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7

Fingering (Fr6): 10 — 0 — 3 — 8 — 8 — 11

Fingering (min7): 11 — 0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4

Fingering ( $\emptyset$ 7): 11 — 0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4

Fingering ( $I_4$ ): 11 — 11 — 5 — 8 — 8 — 3

voice-leading and sometimes to assist in covering technically awkward moments. The latter part of motive *a* is in fact a literal inversion of the opening motive *a* of the Piano Sonata, whilst the four unaccompanied vocal notes which begin the song are a variant of the Sonata's motive *b* (we have already seen how this song is related in a more generalised way to the third and fourth preliminary sonatas). As shown in the harmonic reduc-

tion on the lower two staves of each system in Example 4.6, the three successive tonal areas of the song – A $\flat$  minor/major, D minor and E $\flat$  minor/major – are each delineated by progressions of functional harmonies, and the other chords are connected to these by ‘creeping’ voice-leading. (The ‘creeping’ voices are shown below the staves in pitch-class integer notation<sup>35</sup> and the chord-types of the intervening chords are given in parentheses, including the designations ‘Fr6’ for ‘French’ augmented sixth chord and ‘Q6’ for a quartal chord of six notes.) Quartal harmony is introduced illustratively to the words ‘hallen schwer die Glocken’ (‘the bells resound heavily’) and tallies with the tonal context simply by virtue of a shared diatonic basis – i. e., all the notes of the quartal chord are found in the scale of the D minor tonality (with major sixth) that is invoked in bar iii/6 – rather than through extended notions of functional progression. The harmonic rhythm is one of the song’s most elusive aspects: not until the D minor triad at bar iii/6 does a change of harmony coincide with a bar-line.

The second song of the set has been widely discussed on account of its striking deployment of one sonority: the French sixth, which is enharmonically equivalent to a dominant seventh chord with lowered fifth.<sup>36</sup> It is appropriate in the present context to conceive the chord in terms of its underlying pitch-class configuration [0, 4, 6, 10],<sup>37</sup> a notation which more readily reveals both its internal symmetry and its alignment with the whole-tone scale, since, in accordance with Schoenberg’s advice, it can be manipulated in terms of these features without reference to the tonal origins of the sonority. In tonal usage, the chord generally functions as a secondary dominant, resolving by root motion through a perfect fourth upwards, or – by virtue of the chord’s symmetrical structure at the tritone – through a semitone downwards. Berg exploits the first of these ways at the beginning of the song (bars ii/1–3, see Example 4.7), but resolves each ‘French sixth’ to another equally vagrant ‘French sixth’, thus evading cues towards tonal closure – though the vocal cadence and the rhythmic phraseology project a point of arrival at the beginning of bar ii/4, at which moment the harmony is enharmonically identical with the very opening. The upper line of this harmonic progression, though barely perceived as a line at all in this passage, is treated as a motive (*c*) later in the song, whilst in bars ii/2–3 the voice adopts a second motive (*d*) that is taken up directly in the piano’s transitional passage (bars ii/4–8). Here the harmony continues to be based on [0, 4, 6, 10] chords but in the reverse sequence to the opening; the chords are prolonged and thickened within their respective whole-tone scales, the counterpoint being driven by a near-canon between the hands from bar ii/6 onwards. The texture in this passage is built on a core of parallel major thirds, a model which is found quite frequently in the Piano Sonata, e.g. at bars 5–6 (also in Schoenberg’s Chamber Sym-

Example 4.7 Op. 2/ii: opening, showing motives *c* and *d*

The musical score for the opening of Op. 2/ii is presented in three systems. The top system shows the vocal line in a treble clef, starting with a *pp* dynamic. The lyrics are "Schla - fend trägt man mich in mein Hei - mat - land." Motive *d* is indicated by a bracket above the vocal line, spanning from the second measure to the end of the phrase. The middle system shows the piano accompaniment in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). Motive *c* is indicated by a bracket above the piano part, spanning from the second measure to the end of the phrase. The piano part begins with a *pp* dynamic. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major), and the time signature is 3/4.

phony No. 1 and *Friede auf Erden*, and in some early works by Webern), and which, like 'creeping' but perhaps with even greater longevity, remained part of Berg's compositional palette into a much later period. A new point of arrival is reached at the vocal entry in bar ii/9, supported by a [0, 4, 6, 10] sonority on D, after which the sequence of these chords is interrupted. Successive statements of motive *c* are heard in the voice and piano in bars ii/9–12, and then the material of bars ii/4–8 is taken up again (bars ii/13–14), continuing the sequence of French sixths from the point at which it was interrupted. The palindromic re-use of material is concluded in bars ii/15–18 with a reprise of the opening bars, but varied so as to introduce cross-references both within this song and forward to the next one: first, in bar ii/15, where the faster rate at which the opening chords reappear picks up the rhythm of motive *c* from bars ii/9–12; second, in bars ii/16–17, where bass motion within several of the [0, 4, 6, 10] sonorities between the two potential roots ( $G^b-C$ ,  $E-B^b$ ,  $A-E^b$ ) anticipates the next song's cadential motion between Neapolitan and dominant seventh chords (at bars iii/10–11); thirdly, in bars ii/17–18, through a rhythmic motive in the bass (♩♩♩♩♩♩) which will be heard again in bars iii/2–3 and iii/9–11;<sup>38</sup> and finally, in the metrically incomplete final bar of song two, which is made good by the opening upbeat of song three.

The composition of some of the notable features of these two songs into Op. 2/i served to carry onward Berg's generation of a larger song-cycle. The 6/8 metre of song one, articulated by the exposed rocking bass motion at the beginning (i/1–5), provides an audible precedent for the rhythmic motive, whilst the rocking motion itself anticipates the tritone bass motions found at ii/16–17 and iii/10–11. This is particularly evident at i/7, where the bass also moves through a tritone between two potential harmonic roots of dominant-quality harmony; Example 4.8 shows six examples of this developing harmonic complex from song one, whilst Table

Table 4.2

(a)	i/5–6	0	1	2	3	4	7	10	(t=2)	
(b)	i/7	0	2	3	4	6		10	(t=3)	
(c)	i/10	0		3	4	6		10	(t=3)	
(d)	i/11	0	2	3	4	6	8	10	(t=7)	
(e)	i/16–17	0	1	2	4	6	7	9	10	(t=8)
(f)	i/16–17	0	1	2	4	6	7	8	10	(t=7)

## Example 4.8 Harmonies in Op. 2/i

4.2 indicates their position in the song and reduces them to pitch-class integer notation (the boxes distinguish notes found in moving melodic parts from those heard as elements of the chord). At *i/5–6* (Example 4.8a), the basis in functional harmony is clear, as a chromatically moving line over a stable  $D^7$  chord generates successive sonorities of  $D^{9\#}$ ,  $D^9$  and  $D^{9b}$ . At *i/7* (Example 4.8b), the perfect fifth is lowered – or, rather, the other notes ‘creep’ upwards – to transform the underlying basis into the  $[0, 4, 6, 10]$  sonority (shown in open noteheads) that will feature prominently in song two, once again with a chromatically moving line above. Some would interpret the successive sonorities produced in this bar as  $E_b^{9\#}$ ,  $A^{13}$ ,  $E_b^9$  and  $A^{13b}$ , but this highly differentiated tonal sense, already tenuous at *i/7*, loses explanatory force three bars later (Example 4.8c) when the two alternative ‘roots’ are heard simultaneously: it is clear from the context, however, that the compound dominant quality of the sonority remains a factor in its deployment as part of a harmonic progression.<sup>39</sup> At Example 4.8d this functional aspect is reduced almost to symbolic status as the bass line moves in perfect fourths upwards ( $C\#, F\#, B, E$ ) – akin to the opening of song two – but without taking the corresponding  $[0, 4, 6, 10]$  harmonies with it; and at *i/13–14* the sequence of fourths in the bass continues, not with the  $A$  that might have been expected but after a tritone shift to  $E_b$ , behind which the tritone link embodied in the  $[0, 4, 6, 10]$  sonority hovers unheard. Examples 4.8e and 4.8f are extracted from the harmonically densest passage of the song, and show a continuation of the process seen at Example 4.8c whereby the harmonic basis is expanded by co-opting me-

lodic pitch-classes into it, something which is also found in song two, at bars ii/6–8.

This accumulated density of texture is one strand in a further aspect of the song's construction, as Stephen Kett has shown:<sup>40</sup> both in these terms and more clearly through the progression of its dynamic markings (*ppp–ppp–p–mf–[p]–f–mf–mp–p–pp–ppp–[p–mp]–pppp*) this song develops the ternary form of song three and the palindromic disposition of material in song two into a more flexible principle of organisation that can be applied to many dimensions of compositional technique. Most strikingly of all, Robert Morgan has illustrated how the focal pitches of the vocal line also follow such a pattern,<sup>41</sup> interacting with motivic configurations such as the A–D which is presented in the unaccompanied bass of i/1 and immediately transformed in the vocal entry. This motive will recur (as *b*) in song three; at its clearest emergence as a motive in song one (i/22–5) it is transferred to the top of the texture from the bass in a varied reprise of i/7–10, whilst the voice joins with the inner melodic line of the piano in parallel major thirds, anticipating the textural model of song two, bars ii/6ff. A final revealing detail in this song is to be found in Berg's far more accomplished handling, through Schoenbergian voice-leading, of the same 'Q6' quartal harmony deployed in song three (bars i/18–19, cf. iii/7–9).

Although the sophistication of song one clearly prepares the ground for a coherent cycle, only its less audible features prepare the listener, if at all, for the overt atonality of Op. 2/iv. If we interpret the manuscript evidence to indicate that what prepared Berg himself for the composition of this song was in fact his work on the first movement of the String Quartet Op. 3, then it is clear that on returning to his unfinished song cycle he was sufficiently fluent in deploying what Schoenberg called the 'new resources', or 'new means' ('neue Mittel'), to be capable of incorporating features which link Op. 2/iv back to the first three songs. One way in which he assisted himself was by reserving the newest of the 'new resources' for the central song-within-a-song (iv/9–16); at the song's opening, by comparison, the relationship to the earlier 'means' is clear enough.

First, there are incidental details that allude directly to earlier moments in the cycle: the first four notes of the vocal line, which outline an [0, 4, 6, 10] configuration; the next three notes, which reorder the motivic figure that song three shares with the Piano Sonata; the melody of 'sonnigen Wie-(sen)', which is taken from the previous song (iii/3); and the uppermost piano line in iv/5–6 – perhaps representing the nightingale referred to in the text – which uses the rhythmic motive from songs two and three. Second, there is the construction of the broad piano phrase in the first six bars: this builds significantly on the benefits of Schoenberg's teaching, for having earlier learned a multiplicity of means to bind musical textures and

**Example 4.9** Op. 2/iv: opening sonority with whole-tone prolonging motions (bars 1–2) and ‘creeping’/canonic transformation into second sonority (bars 3–4)

movements together in an extended tonal style, Berg now found himself capable of deploying these techniques in varying combinations separately from the tonal basis, so as to provide, say, motivic coherence in the absence of functional tonal harmony, or to follow recognisable voice-leading in an athematic context. Thus, when the song opens on Neapolitan harmony sustained over the perfect fifth C–G, the prolonging whole-tone motions in bars iv/1–2 lie within the two disjunct whole-tone scales but are nonetheless recognisable as such;<sup>42</sup> the opening sonority is then transformed into the chord that supports the ‘nightingale’ figure, without obvious reference to familiar harmonic types but through ‘creeping’ motions in the four upper voices – for the most part strictly chromatic – which incorporate a canonic treatment of the rhythmic motive (Example 4.9). After a descending flourish in iv/6 of a type familiar from Schoenberg’s music of the same period, the piano settles on a bare tritone oscillation reminiscent of similar figures in all three of the preceding songs – its rhythm here being essentially a written-out *rallentando* – against which the vocal setting of ‘Ich will singen’ (‘I will sing’) seems entirely *extempore*.

The song-within-a-song falls into three micro-sections: in iv/9–11 the core of the piano texture is a pair of parallel major thirds – once again, a familiar ‘resource’ – supported, though not tonally contextualised, by major and minor triads. The vocal line at this point features major thirds also, before arpeggiating the A minor triad from the bottom of the piano texture in alternation with notes at chromatically expanding distances from the notes of the arpeggio (Example 4.10a). Over this is heard a piano figure, clearly illustrative of the words ‘es schmilzt und glitzert kalter Schnee’ (‘cold snow melts and glitters’), which oscillates – once more at the tritone – between two open fifths, one of which is the C–G of the song’s opening. The next micro-section (iv/12–15) is dominated by an intricate construction in the piano’s music which applies the ‘creeping’ principle in differing ways to selected components of a motivic figure, thus transforming it gradually and perceptibly but without reference to an underlying harmonic basis (Example 4.10b); the transition into this from the preceding



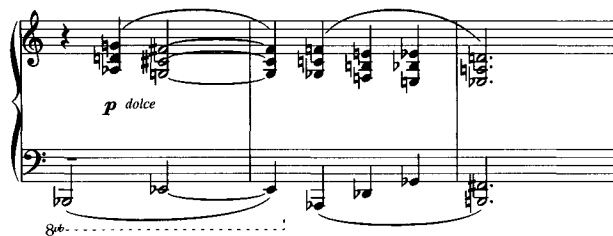
**Example 4.10** (a) Op. 2/iv, bar 11: intervallic expansion from A minor triad

## (b) Op. 2/iv: transformation by multiple 'creeping' in bars 12–15 (piano part)

micro-section is effected by expanding the oscillating major thirds into a miniature wedge motion, whilst transferring the 'melting snow' figure into the bass. The vocal part proceeds without obvious reference to the piano's music, though its gradually rising and widening tessitura follows a path similar in this respect to the motivic transformation. This widening is brought to a dramatic extreme at iv/15 with an outward combination of piano glissandi on black and white key. The final micro-section ensues, restoring the previous registers through downward octave transposition of the treble sonority and upward chromatic creeping in the bass.

As the song-within-a-song concludes, the piano arpeggiates a [0, 4, 6, 10] configuration down to a low B $\flat$ , from which point emerges a succession of augmented ninth and dominant thirteenth chords over a bass line of rising fourths (Example 4.11). A progression of this kind has the strong potential to be tonally directed, but in this overtly atonal composition it functions more comprehensively within a network of contextual links, referring back to song one through the harmony, to the opening of song two through the rising fourths, and to motive *a* of song three through the intervallic configuration of the notes above the ascending bass. The vocal part, projecting the poem's clinching line, conforms with these harmonies in the manner of song one, but detaches itself again over the threefold final cadence, part of which (from iv/22) was cited approvingly by Schoenberg in the *Harmonielehre*.<sup>43</sup>

Example 4.11 Op. 2/iv, bars 20–22, piano part



### String Quartet Op. 3

The first movement of the String Quartet Op. 3 pursues still further, and in an atonal idiom, the interaction between motivic development and a sonata-form outline that we have seen in the Piano Sonata. Characteristically, Adorno saw profound implications in the progress of this idea:

What marks the Quartet as a work of genuinely dialectical character is the fact that its architecture emerges from a loyal critique of the architecture that had until then been requisite for chamber music. ... Berg met not only the authentic requirements of the form, but also those of his own explosive impulses, and to the end maintained the conflict between them. Not a single element remains that does not receive its rationale entirely from its relationship to the formal whole – and ... there is likewise no [aspect of the] form not legitimized by the requirements and impulse of the individual elements. What results from this conflict, however, is nothing less than the *liquidation of the sonata*.<sup>44</sup>

Adorno's interpretation, first published in 1937, and concerned with a work completed in 1910, was conditioned by historical factors – the most obvious of which is that when Adorno was writing, and still more so in 1910, the question of a dichotomy between form and content in an artistic work was far more central to criticism than it is today.<sup>45</sup> A more intractable point – in that it is even less likely to be outmanœuvred through a historically constructed mode of listening – is that an awareness of form, particularly sonata form, was deeply embedded in the minds of educated listeners in the early twentieth century. Adorno's description assumes that the formal model is brought to the music by the listener and through direct experience of the musical argument undergoes a 'loyal critique'. The point is not that this specific work somehow makes sonata form obsolete, but that, on each hearing, it enacts a drama played right on the cusp between an architectural conception of 'form enclosing content' and an organic conception of 'form generated by content'. If awareness of form is not a pro-active part of the listener's mental apparatus, then the dialectic will be unbalanced in favour of the web of motivic correspondences that is

woven before one's very ears, and in the general absence of tonal ordering such music may seem single-minded to the point of narrowness. This was not a failing of the work when Berg composed it, but the Cinderella status of the Quartet in Berg's output suggests that subsequent generations have found its assimilation difficult, perhaps for this reason.

On the other hand, it now seems possible that Adorno and others in his day were themselves kept unaware of a potential factor in the Quartet's interpretation. In 1986, the Greek-German musicologist Constantin Floros made the acquaintance of Fritzi Schlesinger-Czapka, a Viennese neighbour of Helene Berg, who passed on to him the following account which she claimed Helene had dictated to her:

‘The inspiration for Alban Berg’s Op. 3 was based on the following events: It was at my parents’ house in 1908. Many young people came and went, for my sister and I were sociable girls. We had many suitors, and one of these was Alban Berg. None of the young men got near me except Alban! When my father noticed this, he forbade Alban Berg to visit us, because Alban was prone to illness (he had been an asthmatic since his fifteenth year) and had a profession (musician and composer) which didn’t suit my down-to-earth and practical-minded father. Besides, he [my father] was concerned that I too would have a life of worry in store, on account of the chronic illness an asthmatic suffers. The separation hit Alban and me profoundly. Thus Op. 3 came into being. Love speaks in it, and jealousy and indignation over the injustice that was done to us and to our love.’

Helene Berg<sup>46</sup>

What are we to make of this? Although there seems to be no documentary support for her account, this oral history cannot simply be dismissed; and whether or not there is a connection with Op. 3, there is plenty of evidence to confirm the difficulties placed in the way of the young couple by Helene's father, Franz Nahowski, including a long letter sent to him by Berg in July 1910 refuting his objections to their marriage.<sup>47</sup> This emotional scenario certainly tallies with the sense of anger and frustration that some commentators, even in the absence of specific explanation, have heard in the music of the Quartet. ‘With the opening theme [of the second movement],’ writes Mosco Carner, ‘Berg seems to throw down the gauntlet to imaginary enemies.’<sup>48</sup> According to Adorno, ‘Berg liked to say that he wrote the String Quartet ... in defiance, after a publishing firm turned down the Piano Sonata.’<sup>49</sup> Given what we know today of the ‘secret programmes’ of some of Berg's later works,<sup>50</sup> we might readily take this to be the composer's attempt to acknowledge the expressive tone of his Quartet without giving away the motivation for it. Yet we should also observe that Helene Berg's description – if indeed it is hers – is a long way from being a detailed programme. What it purports to outline is no more than an ex-

tra-musical inspiration for an abstract composition, in a manner familiar from Schumann and Brahms – less thoroughly developed even than, say, Berlioz's approach to his *Symphonie Fantastique* – and indeed unremarkable for an era in which composers frequently hedged their bets on the competing merits of 'absolute' music and programme music by allowing it to be thought that their works satisfied criteria for both independently.<sup>51</sup>

Whilst the sonata-form outline of the Quartet's first movement is reasonably clear, the form of the second movement has caused confusion among the most respected observers. Carner describes the movement as a rondo with sonata elements; Floros reads it as a sonata form, but with an 'episode' (bars ii/119–42) placed between the development and a 'free' recapitulation. Adorno's idea of a sonata-rondo is accepted by Redlich, who then goes beyond this to suggest that 'the second movement represents a kind of development of the first movement's exposition'.<sup>52</sup> This interpretation has merit on at least three counts: first, because the development section of the first movement is short in length and does not deal with the movement's principal thematic material; second, because themes from the two movements are interrelated; and third, because it points up the direct reappearance of the first movement's opening theme in the second movement, at bars ii/168ff.

Example 4.12 traces some motivic relationships within the thematic materials of the Quartet. The opening theme of the first movement (Example 4.12a) is notable for its rhythms and for its interplay between specific sizes of intervals. The contour and sextuplet rhythm of the second violin's initial flourish are identical with those of a theme in Schoenberg's String Sextet *Verklärte Nacht* which is marked 'angry, vehement' ('wild, leidenschaftlich', Example 4.13); the descending semitone intervals in Schoenberg's theme are transformed here into descending whole tones, and all notes of the gesture but one (C<sub>4</sub>) are confined to a single whole-tone scale. This intervallic consistency is taken up by the viola and cello under the violin's sustained B<sub>4</sub> – the viola moving downwards through successive semitone intervals and the cello through perfect fourths. Both of these represent an immediate transformation of the violin's opening three notes, similar to the transformation effected, outside the piece, from Schoenberg's theme: the motion is in each case through a segment of a single *interval cycle*. Berg's awareness of the interval cycles is well documented;<sup>53</sup> an example of their harmonic, as opposed to melodic, use is to be found in the first movement of the Quartet at bars i/98–101, where in a climactic passage the second violin, viola and cello play identical material homophonically, four times over: the first time forming parallel diminished triads, the second time parallel quartal harmonies, the third time parallel augmented triads. In each of these cases, the harmony is formed

## Example 4.12 Some thematic and motivic connections in Op. 3

(a) I/i

(b) II/25

(c) I/7

(d) II/5

(e) I/10

(f) II/1

I/15

II/2

II/10

Example 4.13 Schoenberg, *Verklärte Nacht* Op. 4, violin I, bars 137–8 (*wild, leidenschaftlich*)

from a single type of interval; on the fourth statement, the three instruments form parallel harmonies of the type found in the right hand of the piano at bars iv/20–22 of Op. 2 (see pp. 75–6). Example 4.12b shows how the Quartet's opening flourish is in turn transformed in the second move-

ment, simply by replacing the whole-tone cycle with perfect fourths, whilst attaching the whole-tone descent onto the end of the figure.

Pursuing the sequence of material at the opening a little further, we find that both the rhythm and the pitch sequence of the violin's oscillating figure to and from the B $\flat$  are picked up in later material. The pitch sequence is an incipient wedge shape, with intervals expanding from the sustained note to a semitone, thence to a whole tone, a minor third and a major third (cf. Op. 2, bars iv/12–15); both this and the rhythm are developed – to identify but one instance – in the continuation of the opening figure in the second movement (see Example 4.12e). Example 4.12c shows how the viola's underpinning of the oscillation at i/4 begins to follow an inverse of its interval sequence (the cello duplicates the violin a major tenth lower); the viola stops before playing the E $\flat$  and G $\flat$  from the inverted sequence, but these notes are used to begin the consequent phrase in the first violin at i/7. The whole-tone allegiance of this phrase is even more apparent than that of the opening: its pitch sequence, in inversion, is used for the vigorous theme heard at ii/5 in the viola and cello (Example 4.12d), the continuation of which picks up the exaggerated wedge shape from ii/2. After the theme shown in Example 4.12c, the first violin continues with a phrase built straightforwardly from the motive shown in Example 4.12e; the answering phrase from the viola treats this in inversion (i/14), whilst the bass part has the original form of the motive; at i/15 this is played in broken figuration against a pedal point, setting up a model for the wider wedges seen at the opening of the second movement (and indeed subsequently in the first). As a final illustration, Example 4.12f shows how the viola's semitone cycle from i/2–3 is used at the very outset of the second movement (it is of course also a transformation of the first movement's opening notes); the continuation uses the motive from Example 4.12e. In a subsequent contrasting theme (ii/10) the semitone intervals are replaced by whole tones.

This account of the materials shown in Example 4.12 has considered merely the relationships between musical ideas that are themselves the basis of further ongoing transformations. There are other thematically differentiated materials which have not been discussed here: indeed, the whole Quartet proceeds on this basis with a remarkable intensity that cannot be reflected in detailed verbal description. Leaving this aside, then, there is an interesting point to be followed up from the identification of a theme from *Verklärte Nacht* as a model. Redlich's discussion convincingly compares various themes from the Quartet with themes from Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung* and *Ein Heldenleben*, and also Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*;<sup>54</sup> Floros compares some melodic lines from Berg's second movement with passages in Schoenberg's *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* – a

work which Berg knew intimately and had heard at its first performance in Vienna on 14 January 1910<sup>55</sup> – and he, too, raises the spectre of *Tristan*. Much if not all of this could be dismissed as idle speculation (and Adorno was unusually adamant that ‘no model can be found’)<sup>56</sup> were it not for Floros’s identification of an apparently innocuous string quartet sketch by Berg as a model for the theme at i/7 of Op. 3.<sup>57</sup> Not only this, but nearby sketches resemble the theme from *Verklärte Nacht* shown in Example 4.13, according to Floros – though he does not pursue the point. Perhaps even more remarkable is a passage in the first movement of Op. 3 (bars i/126–31) that is adapted from the subsidiary theme of Berg’s fifth preliminary piano sonata, a tonal work written immediately prior to his Op. 1.<sup>58</sup> There are strong indications, then, that Berg’s earliest atonal venture – for this it was – was achieved, in part at least, by adapting tonal models. Certainly, the methods of interval substitution and expansion we have seen operating in Op. 3 and in bars iv/12–15 of Op. 2 indicate that Berg had the means at his disposal to adapt thematic material away from its harmonic context, an aspect of technique which distinguishes these works from the Piano Sonata.

Of all the passages in Op. 3 that can be related to tonal models, the one which most defies formal integration with the rest of the work is the episode in the second movement, bars ii/119ff. As Floros shows, the thematic material here is akin to a theme from the love duet in *Tristan und Isolde*, heard at Isolde’s words ‘Barg im Busen uns sich die Sonne’. In Berg’s Quartet, the continuation uses this theme in inversion (ii/133ff.), perhaps suggesting that the model was not the love duet, but rather Act III scene 1 of Wagner’s opera, in which Tristan, separated from Isolde by the jealous King Marke, is convinced she will return to him but torn asunder by the feelings this situation engenders inside him. Here Wagner, too, uses the theme both in its original form and in inversion, in order to signify Tristan’s vacillating emotions. The correlation not only with Berg’s handling of the theme but also with his separation from Helene is striking, if one wishes to think of the music in these terms.

At the same time, we should observe that Berg takes up the inversion of the theme for specifically musical purposes: other themes also return in inversion until, following a broad statement of the movement’s opening theme (ii/151), the music recapitulates the opening material of the first movement (ii/168). From this point, the movement’s latent focus on D as a pitch centre gains momentum – the first violin’s repeated melodic cadence in bars ii/217–20 is particularly important in this process – until an extraordinary flourish in the final bar exposes a momentary chord of D minor, a tonality which is known to have had a private significance for Berg and Helene.<sup>59</sup> The tonal focus here distils and balances a less specific ex-

tended tonality found in the final pages of the first movement, brought about from bar i/166 by a core of parallel major thirds in a whole-tone dominated texture and in bars i/172–6 and i/180 to the end of the movement through the continual appearance of harmonies akin to those found at bars iv/20–22 of Op. 2. But despite the possible clues, its detailed extra-musical significance remains, like the transcendental interaction of form and motive, imperfectly available to later generations.