

Wozzeck

Alban Berg's Operas

The Three Fragments from *Wozzeck* were premiered as early as 1924, at the Frankfurt Tonkünstlerfest [“Musicians’ Festival”]. The legendary world premiere of the complete opera took place over a year later, on 14 December 1925. In accordance with common practice at the time, carefully crafted reductions were prepared – notably by Erwin Stein (1885–1958) for Universal Edition; they interfered only marginally with the full scores, mainly intending to reduce orchestral doublings wherever it seemed musically acceptable.

It was not until 1995 that John Rea (b. 1944) ventured a more radical approach by working out a chamber version which is effective despite requiring only 21 instruments. Rea says that his reduction is actually an expansion, an enlargement, since each of the 21 musicians in the chamber orchestra plays much more often than in Berg’s score, executing musical sections which frequently did not originally “belong to them.”

By contrast, the version Eberhard Kloke prepared in 2004 calls for 38 musicians and dispenses entirely with the chorus. Yet he still adhered strictly to Berg’s score. The winds are streamlined, the “filler” instruments eliminated and the string divisi have been reconsidered. Apart from variable spatial situations (e.g. no orchestra pit), Kloke’s version allows for more radical changes of scene, more in line with the fragmentary, unframed character of Büchner’s play.

OVERVIEW OF THE VERSIONS

Wozzeck (1914–1921)

Opera in 3 acts (15 scenes)

Original version

Orchestration: 4 4 5 4 – 4 4 4 1 – timp. (2), perc. (4), harp, celesta, strings

Onstage: tavern music – fiddles (2-4), clar., accordion, guitar, bass tuba

Military music: 3 2 2 2 – 2 2 3 1 – perc., upright piano

Chamber orch.: 1 2 3 2 – 2 0 0 0 – str. (1 1 1 1 1)

Duration: 90 min.

Wozzeck (1914–1921)

Opera in 3 acts (15 scenes)

Reduced orchestration by Erwin Stein

Orchestration: 3 3 3 3 – 4 3 3 1 – timp. (2), perc. (4), celesta, harp, strings

Onstage: tavern music – fiddles (2-4), clar., accordion, guitar, bass tuba, upright piano

Chamber orch.: 1 2 3 2 – 2 0 0 0 – str. (1 1 1 1 1)

Duration: 90 min.

Wozzeck (1914–1921)

Opera in 3 acts (15 scenes)

Version for chamber orchestra by Eberhard Kloke (2004)

Orchestration: 2 2 3 2 – 2 2 2 1 – perc., harp, pno., strings (5 4 3 3 2)

Onstage music*: 2 fiddles, pno., accordion, guitar, bombardon

Chamber music: 1 2 3 2 – 2 0 0 0, strings (1 1 1 1 1)

Duration: 90 min.

Wozzeck (1914–1921)

Opera in 3 acts (15 scenes)

Version for chamber ensemble by John Rea (1995)

Orchestration: 1 2 3 2 – 2 1 1 0 – perc. (2), harp, pno., strings

Duration: 90 min.

* Onstage music: the stage music for Kloke's versions of Wozzeck is available for performance audio feed on CD, on hire from UE.