

*Adagio from Kammerkonzert (1923–1925)*

Alban Berg

Alban Berg (1885–1935) composed *Kammerkonzert* between 1923 and 1925 and dedicated it to his former teacher Arnold Schoenberg. The influence of Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School is evident throughout the concerto's structure. It is based, in part, on the earlier Schoenberg *Chamber Symphony*. It is pervaded, structurally, by a dependence on the number three. It uses as motto themes, the musical spelling of Schoenberg's, Berg's, and their associate Anton Webern's names.

The *Adagio* itself, reduced by the composer in 1935 from the original thirteen winds, violin and piano, is what might be termed a "ternary palindrome." In other words, the music is cast in two mirror-image sections of three parts each. The second section, joining the first through the intercession of twelve low C-sharp "chimes" on the piano, is a reversal of the first, a formal device used often by the Viennese and particularly by Webern.

In a manner idiomatic to Berg, however, the immediate impact of the music is one of romantic lyricism. The surface organization of the music is rather free, encompassing what Berg termed a triple division of harmony: tonal, atonal, and "subject to the laws of Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique." Even sections governed by the latter technique, however, are not rigorously boxed into a pre-determined theoretical construct. The opening melody, for example, may be read as a twelve-tone row with added chromatic notes. The harmony is replete with fourths and parallel or arpeggiated thirds, giving, on the whole, a texture that constantly implies the traditions of tonality.