PREFACE
Adapted from the Opening Paragraphs of My Doctoral Dissertation,
Extended Tonality and Voice Leading in Twelve Songs, Op. 27, by Alexander Zemlinsky
(Brandeis University, 1993)

Alexander (von) Zemlinsky *(b. Vienna 14 October 1871, d. Larchmont NY 15 March 1942)* was not only a renowned composer, but was also highly regarded as a conductor. Although he was Arnold Schoenberg's teacher and brother-in-law, and a friend to both Anton Webern and Alban Berg, Zemlinsky never composed twelve-tone music. His compositions reflect an individualistic reaction to several of the prevailing modes of composition during a time of great political, social, and artistic upheaval.

For this reason, and for the music's beauty and integrity of craftsmanship, I edited and arranged Zemlinsky's **Twelve Songs**, Op. 27 (1937–1938). This work offers twelve microcosmic examples of his mature compositional style. Each song possesses unique musical qualities worthy of one's attention. I contend that Op. 27 is a song cycle, not merely a set of twelve songs, and that tonal forces govern the organization of the piece as a whole. A discussion of the possible expressive motivations behind Zemlinsky's choice and ordering of the texts and of his word-painting follows.

The texts Zemlinsky chose to set to music in his **Twelve Songs** are by poets from various cultures and eras. Although the combinations of poems are much in keeping with his earlier tendencies towards eclecticism, the choices he made are atypical when compared with those made by his contemporaries in Europe and America who composed in related post-Romantic styles. In a way, these songs present in microcosm the kinds of literary choices Zemlinsky made for musical settings throughout his career.

It was customary for Zemlinsky to include one or two Goethe poems in song cycles based on other poets. For example, his early composition, *Lieder*, Op. 2 (1894–1896), employs a text by Goethe in the fifth song, and his mature composition *Six Songs*, Op. 22 (1934), employs two of Goethe's poems in the third and fourth songs. In Op. 27, Zemlinsky uses Goethe's poem *Wandrers Nachtlied* for the twelfth song.

In his *Symphonische Gesänge*, Op. 20 (1929), Zemlinsky employed texts from a collection of African-American poetry titled *Afrika Singt*. The poems were a great source of inspiration to him. The first, fifth, and sixth of the seven songs of *Symphonische Gesänge* employ texts by Langston Hughes. Zemlinsky used his poem, *Misery,* for the seventh song, and his poem, *Danse Africaine,* for the ninth song in Op. 27. *Danse Africaine* also appears in another setting as the sixth song in *Symphonische Gesänge.* Zemlinsky employed the poem, *The Harlem Dancer,* by another Negro poet, Claude McKay, for the eighth song in Op. 27. Zemlinsky was fascinated with the poetry of Eastern cultures, a penchant shared with and inspired by Gustav Mahler. (Zemlinsky and Mahler collaborated occasionally. Mahler conducted the premiere of Zemlinsky's opera, *Es War Einmal,* at the Hofoper in 1900.) Zemlinsky's *Lyrische Symphonie*, Op. 18 (1925), seven songs for baritone and soprano soloists with orchestra, is composed on texts by the modern Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore.

Comparisons with Mahler's composition, *Das Lied von der Erde (*1911), seem inevitable when making even a reference to the genesis of the *Lyric Symphony*, and justifiably so. Mahler's composition had a profound influence on the *Lyric Symphony.* Aside from some striking formal, syntactical, and esthetic similarities, these two sets of symphonic songs both employ texts of Eastern origin. The texts for Mahler's piece were selected from a collection of poetry titled *Die chinesische Flöte* (*The Chinese Flute)*. For his **Twelve Songs**, Zemlinsky selected poetry by two Sanskrit writers, Amaru for the fifth song, and Kalidasa for the second, third, fourth, and eleventh songs.

One can examine the order of the texts using any number of analytical approaches ranging from the obvious to the subtle. Let us begin with a general overview.

Zemlinsky's manuscript for Op. 27 shows how he struggled with the order of the songs. <u>Figure 1</u> presents the twelve songs in the order in which they appear in the score published by Mobart Publications. Regarding the manuscript, the second column shows the position in which each of the songs appears, the third indicates the eight songs which have Arabic numbers not written over other Arabic numbers, the fourth column shows the four songs which have Arabic numbers written over other Arabic numbers, and the fifth one indicates the five songs which have Roman numerals.

Figure 1

Song	Position in Ms.	Arabic	#/#	Roman
1. *Entführung*	2	1		I
2. *Sommer*	3		2/3	
3. *Frühling*	4	2	3 /4	
4. *Jetzt ist die Zeit*	5		4 /5	
5. *Die Verschmähte*	6		5/6	
6. *Der Wind des Herbstes*	7	4, 6		
7. *Elend*	8	7		VI
8. *Harlem Tänzerin*	9	8		
9. *Afrikanischer Tanz*	10	9		VII
10. *Gib ein Lied mir wieder*	11			III
11. *Regenzeit*	1	11		
12. *Wandrers Nachtlied*	12			II

In Figure 2, again following the ordering of the published score, the second column indicates the poet's name, the third shows his dates, and the fourth column   indicates his nationality.

Figure 2

Song	Poet	Dates	Nationality
1. *Entführung*	George	1868–1933	German
2. *Sommer*	Kalidasa	5th Century AD	Indian
3. *Frühling*	Kalidasa	5th Century AD	Indian
4. *Jetzt ist die Zeit*	Kalidasa	5th Century AD	Indian
5. *Die Verschmähte*	Amaru	5th Century AD	Indian
6. *Der Wind des Herbstes*	Kalidasa	5th Century AD	Indian
7. *Elend*	Hughes	1902–1967	African-American
8. *Harlem Tänzerin*	McKay	1889–1948	African-American
9. *Afrikanischer Tanz*	Hughes	1868–1933	African-American
10. *Gib ein Lied mir wieder*	George	1902–1967	German
11. *Regenzeit*	Kalidasa	5th Century AD	Indian
12. *Wandrers Nachtlied*	Goethe	1741–1832	German

Cyclic organization is clearly present in the ordering of the texts, which exhibit distinct subgroups. At the beginning of **Twelve Songs** is a poem by a contemporary German poet. This is followed by five songs composed on texts by two Sanskrit poets. Next, in what one might call the centerpiece of the twelve songs, three poems by two contemporary African-American poets appear. Then follows a sort of recapitulation, a return to one text each by the same German and Sanskrit poets whose texts were the basis for the first two songs. Op. 27 concludes with a poem by perhaps the greatest German poet, Goethe. This singular appearance provides a sense of literary reflection and culmination to **Twelve Songs**. Zemlinsky probably intended to contain or enclose the exotic character of the Sanskrit and African-American poetry within references to modern and classical German culture. A subtler, more in-depth interpretation of the ordering of the texts requires a thorough examination of the poetry. The English version that appears in the published score unfortunately deviates extensively from the meaning of the German texts, so I created my own English versions*, including ones for the three African-American poems*. I did this so that the meaning of the German versions, which influenced Zemlinsky's musical choices, would be more accurately reflected in the English version.

As mentioned earlier, study of Op. 27 leads to the conclusion that Zemlinsky intended this collection as a cycle, not merely as a set of songs. Common literary themes link the songs together in a logical sequence. Apart from the progression of texts illustrated above, atmospheric poems about love (#1–4, #11) and intensely emotional poems (#5, #7–9) are all concerned with sexuality. In addition, the progression through the seasons that runs throughout the song cycle is analogous to the progression from youth (the "beloved child" in #1), through adolescence (the awakening of denial and torment in #2), through love affairs (#5), to old age and the preparation for death (#10 and #12).

The first song, set to Stefan George's poem, *Entführung*, begins by beckoning the listener into "forests of distant lore" with the initial words, "Come with me, beloved child." Contextually, the reference is to the poem's other protagonist, the lover being the storyteller. The poem paints a sensuous picture of a pair of carefree lovers beside a lake in a forest. A fragrant breeze blows over their glistening bodies. Meanwhile, soft linens lie bleaching-out on the grassy shore. Then the lovers, in a state of transcendental communion with one another and with nature, softly sing and scatter flowers. Interestingly, the title of this song literally means "Abduction" not "Elopement" as suggested in the published score. The term "abduction" implies some force at work pulling either or both of the protagonists into this exotic, sensuous scene, and that no resistance can be offered against this

prevailing force. The term "elopement" implies a willingness on the part of one or both of the protagonists to enter "the forests of distant lore." (It seems intentional that one cannot discern whether the abductor is the storyteller or nature itself.) Presumably, the "distant lore" is so compelling that it cannot be resisted. The title "Abduction" paints a rather blissful scene with a touch of melancholy.

The scene for the second song, *Summer*, is a sultry one, with references to pleasant fragrances, the breasts of beautiful, brown-skinned women, and the music of harps and bird songs. (A similar scene occurs in the next song. Brown skin is a link to the African-American poems as well.) The final line of *Summer* deals with a literary theme that will appear repeatedly throughout the remainder of the song cycle, that is aroused desire accompanied by some degree of torment. In the second song, this theme is manifested as a result of the "God of Love" having been awakened.

In the scene for the third song, *Spring*, the "God of Love" (presumably the same protagonist awakened in the preceding song) is beckoned by the fearless cries of impassioned maidens for long-awaited salvation. However, we know from the ending of the second song that this salvation may be interpreted as being bittersweet in nature. The main difference between the second and third songs is the season.   A progression through the seasons continues after the second and third songs; spring is portrayed in the fourth song, *Now Is the Time* (an extension of the subject matter of the preceding song), autumn in the sixth song, and the "rainy" (or monsoon) season in the eleventh song.

Upon reflection, one notices the first four songs are unified by predominant literary motives. Exotic dark-skinned women and nature (the out-of-doors) are of primary importance. Sensuousness is the dominant mood. The lover is the storyteller in the first song. In the second and third songs, the lover is deified and becomes the object of desire of the women in each poem. The lover is absent from the fourth song. Flowers, a motive in the first, third, and fourth songs, are symbolic of springtime, a time of ripening. Similarly, the emphasis upon the breasts of beautiful women in the second and third songs is upon "ripeness." Pleasant fragrances pervade the scenes of the first three songs, adding to the sensuousness of the scenes.

In the fifth song, *The Rejected*, the motive of nature is not present. This song is exclusively about a pair of lovers. It portrays a woman who humbly and honestly offers herself to a man who, unmoved by her earnest advances, shuns her. For the rest of her life, she refuses to forsake her love for him. This song extends the concept of aroused desire intermingled with torment, the dominant concept of the second song.

The lover is absent from the sixth song, *The Autumn Wind*. The text for this song, like that of the fourth, is exclusively about nature. It is night. Winds waft fragrances into the air. The sea lies calm. The star-filled night sky is clear, and   moonlight shines down upon Earth. (One notes that pale young maidens were compared to the beauty of moons in the fourth song. The pale-skinned women and the presence of moonlight contrasts with the dark-skinned women and the presence of sunlight of the earlier songs.)

 The seventh song, *Misery*, like the fifth, is exclusively concerned with the link between torment and desire. The major difference between these two texts is that the poem for the fifth song is written in the third person, and the poem for the seventh song is in the first person. The setting now shifts from ancient India to contemporary Harlem. The literary themes of each poem are similar. Each text concerns a woman hopelessly in love with a man who will not have her. The main difference between these two women is that the one portrayed in the fifth song will never renounce her feelings for her former lover, whereas the woman of the seventh song would like to forget her former lover by attempting to become absorbed in blues music.

The poem for the eighth song, *Harlem Dancer*, is the most provocative and descriptive text in the entire cycle. The culture of the main character, the dancing girl, remains African-American, as in the preceding song. This poem, told by an onlooker, is in the first person. The *Harlem Dancer* who is the subject of the poem is similar to the dark-skinned women of the preceding songs. She is soft and charming, but also distant and lonely, like the women who were the subjects of the fifth and seventh songs. While stirring the passions of others, the dancer herself remains detached. One sentence harkens back to the sensuous settings of the earlier Sanskrit texts: "She appeared to my mind as a palm tree, which stands erect Only in a storm." One learns from this sentence that the storyteller is somewhat removed from urban America, occupied with inner thoughts of some far-away, exotic place.

In the ninth song, *African Dance*, the subject of the poem is also a dark-skinned female dancer who is in this case African, not African-American. Appealing to the most primitive instincts of the onlookers, the dancer "awakens their blood." The poetic image of music accompanying a sensuous scene appears in the second, seventh, and eighth songs.

Reflecting on the cycle to this point, one notes that the first nine songs are largely songs about youthfulness. The tenth, *Give Me a Song Again*, sets a poem about old age and the preparation for death. The poet is Stefan George, whose poem, *Abduction,* appears in the first song. This return to contemporary German suggests that old age is a metaphor for the distancing of modern qualities from the primal, idyllic qualities of the Indian and African-American songs.

A concept shared by the first and tenth poems is that the storyteller of the first song "offers" his beloved child the gift of a song, and in the tenth one, the storyteller "requests" of the other protagonist that the gift of a song be offered in the "clear tones" of that person's more joyful days. As was previously mentioned, the woman who is the subject of the seventh song wishes to have blues music played for her. With so much emphasis on the place where "dark souls reflect," "sick
souls speak," and "soothing souls flatter," this song sets up an opposition to the world of young love. The nostalgic, backward-looking nature of the tenth song links-up with the fantasy-like character of the first George setting.

Given the presence of six texts by Indian poets, we may well imagine that Zemlinsky, either on a conscious or unconscious level, was influenced by the idea embodied in the Sanskrit philosophy of the cyclic nature of life and death. (It is interesting to note that Olivier Messiaen composed his *Turangalîla Symphony* just ten years after the completion of **Twelve Songs**. *Turangalîla* provides an example of a piece composed by a contemporary of Zemlinsky who also explored the possibilities of an eclectic but personal musical language influenced in part by Sanskrit philosophy.)

The placement of the eleventh song, *The Time of Rain,* further supports a cyclic interpretation of the ordering of the songs. The return to Kalidasa's poetic style, whose texts are the basis for the second, third, fourth, and sixth songs, reasserts the predominant poetic style in Op. 27. The poem itself is a curtain call for literary motives from the preceding songs. Included among these motives are flowers, sensuous fragrances, and lovers full of yearning for one another. The image of trees bending down, burdened by their own blossoms, can stir either thoughts of youth or of old age in one's mind. A seemingly intentional ambiguity exists between whether to interpret this song as representing memories of things past, or to see it as standing apart from the two poems that immediately surround it.

The text for the twelfth song, Goethe's *Wandrers Nachtlied,* is about old age as well. It goes one step further towards the idea of the hereafter than did the tenth song. The weary storyteller now cries out to the Eternal to be released from the sadness, pain, and misery associated with the pleasures of this world, to be delivered into the peacefulness of the World to Come. This provides a fitting conclusion to a song cycle which emphasizes the idea that human desire embodies some degree of torment.

The choice and ordering of the texts not only indicate cyclic organization, but on another level, it indicates that Zemlinsky was grappling with a dilemma shared by some of his contemporaries: how to deal with frankly Romantic tendencies in a modern way. If one were to regard Zemlinsky as a moderate, his style at the time of this composition falls somewhere between that of Richard Strauss, the post-Romanticist, and George Gershwin, the popular   modernist.

The departure from and return to stylized Romanticism, after sojourns into the literary realms of Sanskrit and contemporary African-American poetry, I believe substantiates this claim. The over-all conceptualization of this song cycle seems to me a humanistic, compassionate approach to the treatment of human subjects through the exploration of a basically eclectic but highly personal musical language. I am referring to the eclectic yet integrated post-Romantic musical language of this song cycle.

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Disclaimer: This edition was prepared for a music publisher who later backed-out of our verbal agreement. The English lyrics appear above the German lyrics in the present edition because this is their house style. Otherwise, they would have appeared in the opposite order. Having changed them all once already, it is far too much work to change them all again.