

# Alexander Albrecht's Musical Output in the Milieu of Interwar Bratislava

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### ABSTRACT

The subject of this contribution is Alexander/Sándor Albrecht's musical output from the 1920s in the context of the development of the composer's musical style, his life and the social and political changes in Bratislava after 1918. Albrecht returned to Pressburg/Pozsony in 1908 after his studies in Budapest and devoted his organisational and artistic activity to the city; in 1921 he became the conductor at the Kirchenmusikverein (until 1952), a traditional music institution of the city. In 1920s Albrecht also achieved the creation of his own musical style. Coming out from a base of late Romanticism, Albrecht applied in that time the modernistic principles to his oeuvre. In 1924 he wrote his mature Piano Suite, and in 1926 his Sonatina for 11 Instruments, an interesting piece of well-balanced formal and harmonic innovations, and one of the first pieces for chamber ensemble (after Schoenberg's *Kammersinfonie*) in the Central European context. In 1929 Albrecht's oratorio-like *Marienleben: Three Poems after R. M. Rilke* for soprano, mixed chorus and orchestra was successfully premiered. The present study contains detailed analyses of these three pieces, which are the most outstanding and distinctive works by the composer.

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### KEYWORDS

Alexander/Sándor Albrecht, Bratislava, Piano Suite, Sonatina for 11 Instruments, *Marienleben*

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Alexander Albrecht (1885–1958) ranks among the most significant composers and performers in the musical life of Bratislava (in its entire historical context) and, following the enormous social and political changes after 1918, he made a significant contribution to the formation of Slovak musical culture. Albrecht did not come from a Slovak background and he only “became” a Slovak composer (he considered Hungarian as his native language), similarly grew attached to the city where he lived and worked. His influence on the development of the musical life of Bratislava in the interwar period and, consequently, on the generations of Slovak composers is undeniable.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1920 and 1930s, Albrecht was actually the only professional Slovak composer who achieved acknowledgement and success abroad, mainly with his Piano Quintet (1913) and String Quartet in D Major, Op. 19 (1918). There was a dominant line of German romanticism in Albrecht’s works, but he also absorbed the contemporaneous trends in modern music – his works bear marks of impressionism and expressionism and, later, he applied the principles of “*Neue Sachlichkeit*.” Through this adoption of the modern principles of composition, he actually created his own version of musical modernism. Albrecht overcame local provincialism and composed many noteworthy and audacious works – the Piano Suite (1924), Sonatina for 11 Instruments (1926), and *Marienleben* (1929), an “oratorio-like” composition, to name but a few. The latter is considered to be the climax of the composer’s oeuvre in general, and also the culmination of the ambitions of musical output in the Slovak milieu. It is this period of Albrecht’s activities that forms the main focus of this study.

## 1. “BIOGRAPHICAL” NOTES

Alexander Albrecht/Albrecht Sándor was born on August 12, 1885 in Arad, where his father was a professor at a gymnasium, but, shortly afterwards, the family moved to Kaposvár and, two years later (1887), to Bratislava (called Pozsony/Pressburg at that time), which became Albrecht’s hometown. After his graduation from the Royal Catholic Gymnasium (where he met his elder schoolmate, Béla Bartók), Albrecht studied at the Music Academy in Budapest (1903–1908), where his teachers included Hans Koessler (for composition), István Thomán and later Béla Bartók (piano), Ferenc Szandtner (conducting) and Dávid Popper (chamber music), and he also studied law. The choice of the Music Academy in Budapest did not seem to be a very obvious one because Vienna was much closer, but Albrecht was motivated by Bartók and by his own attitude to the very conservative Music Academy of Vienna. From 1908, Albrecht worked in Pozsony as the organist of St. Martin’s Cathedral and as a teacher at the Municipal School of Music. In 1921, he became the conductor and director of the Kirchenmusikverein/Church Music Society at St. Martin’s Cathedral (until 1952), and he significantly raised the level of the ensemble. Albrecht performed many vocal-instrumental works with this ensemble – besides Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 (there had been a tradition of performing this work from 1835) and traditional Church music repertory, the musicians played some novelties, too: Max Reger’s

<sup>1</sup>Albrecht had an excellent relationship with the Slovak composers of the so-called founder generation of Slovak national music – Alexander Moyzes (1906–1984, although this friendship was not always smooth), Eugen Suchoň (1908–1993), and Ján Cikker (1911–1989). During his studies, Ladislav Holoubek (1913–1995) lived in Albrecht’s flat, and Albrecht also kept in touch with the youngest generation (Ivan Parík, 1936–2005, etc.). We must also mention his strong artistic and professional relationship with the older generation of Slovak composers – Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský (1881–1958), and Mikuláš Moyzes (1872–1944, father of Alexander Moyzes).



oratorio *Die Nonnen*, or Karol Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater*. Albrecht was also extremely busy with organizational work in the ensemble (he was not only its conductor and musical director, but had to ensure the whole functioning of the ensemble – organizing rehearsals, buying sheet music, finances), which made him interrupt his compositional activities. After the dissolution of the Church Music Society (1952) and the Municipal School of Music (almost 1945), Albrecht devoted himself predominantly to composing. On August 30, 1958, he committed suicide.

## 2. ALBRECHT'S "MATURING"

Albrecht began to compose very early in his life – many of his compositions were written in the 1890s, in which he demonstrated his compositional ambitions. These included works for the piano, songs, chamber music, often for “domestic music-making,” but also some more extensive compositions, like his cantata *Chronos und die Jugend*, or his *Missa in C*. It is evident that he drew on the tradition of neo-Romanticism, a tradition he considered to be his own, and whose main features remained present in his works until his death. A truly romantic pathos characterizes his *Sonata for the Piano in F Major* of 1905 (from the time of his studies in Budapest). This sonata, in two movements, has an interesting formal scheme. Its first movement (*Allegro appassionato*) is in a free sonata form, with an extensive section (quasi coda, 54 bars) attached to the end, unrelated to the previous thematic material. The whole final section has a “reprise form” with an exciting middle section. The second movement (*Tempo di menuetto*), in variation form, suggests traditional models (there is an extensive section in F minor – “minore” with a central disposition), and Albrecht again attaches an extensive closing section with the thematic material of the “coda” of the previous part added to its end. This tendency to “frame the form” with the exposition of new thematic material in the endings of both movements of the sonata contrasts with the composer's later ambitions of maximal concentration of the thematic material; on the other hand, it is just a moderation of the choice, and elaboration of the thematic material, of variations, which later became characteristic for Albrecht's approach to composition.

In the period before the outbreak of World War I, Albrecht composed several mature songs (of which *Rosenzeit*, 1909, *Der Verdammte*, 1909, *Die Reue*, 1910, and *Biographie*, 1910, resonated the most), and such works as the *Piano Quintet* of 1913, which became one of his most successful works. This extensive composition in five movements is based on neo-Romanticism, and is characterized by an extraordinary, elaborate structure and form.

The outbreak of World War I interrupted Albrecht's compositional activities (in 1915, he joined the army and served in an artillery unit for a short time). During the war, he composed his *Pietà* for voice and piano (1917), setting to music Rainer Maria Rilke's poem, which became the middle part of the composer's “oratorio” *Marienleben*, his most significant work, a decade later. In 1918, he wrote his *String Quartet in D Major*, Op. 19, which, compared to his sombre *Pietà*, abounds in feelings of joy and well-being (Albrecht got married in 1918). It became the most successful piece of the composer abroad (with outings in Austria, Germany, France, and the USA). In 1922, it was performed at a concert where the *String Quartet No. 4*, Op. 22 by Paul Hindemith (1895–1963) was premiered, whereby Albrecht's work won recognition by the public as well as by critics.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Ferdinand KLINDA, *Alexander Albrecht* (Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1959), 106. From the annotation, it is clear that the documentation for this statement was probably lost during World War II.



The feelings of the family's well-being and the birth of their son Ján (Ján Albrecht, 1919–1996, nicknamed Hansi) are expressed in his extensive symphonic poem *The Sleeping Beauty* (*Dornröschen*, 1921).

### 3. POZSONY/PRESSBURG – BRATISLAVA

In the meantime, enormous changes were happening – the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire forever left its mark on the life of the city of Pozsony/Pressburg, where Albrecht lived, and which was soon renamed Bratislava. On January 1, 1919, Czechoslovakian troops invaded the city, and Bratislava, the former coronation city of Hungary, became the capital of Slovakia. The inhabitants of the city (42% of whom were German, 41% Hungarian, and 15% Slovak in 1910)<sup>3</sup> viewed the new situation with deep antipathy (in an effort to avoid the annexation of the city to Czechoslovakia, the representatives of the city even attempted to declare Pozsony a “free city,” named “Wilson’s City”). The major part of 1919 was characterized by uncertainty and a state of emergency in the city. After the dissolution of Béla Kun’s Hungarian Soviet Republic, the situation calmed down and a new period of development began for Bratislava. Albrecht suddenly became a member of the “minority,” although it took some time until the German and Hungarian inhabitants became a minority in the city. Nevertheless, during the interwar period, the Czech and the Slovak population of the city doubled, and its ethnic profile changed significantly (by 1930, 48.5% of the population of the city were Slovaks (Czechoslovaks), 26.5% Germans, and 15.5% Hungarians). Albrecht later accepted the new conditions with satisfaction. As a musician and an “internationalist,” he was not at all interested in nationalistic conflicts. On the contrary, he appreciated the new inspirations he drew from the Czech artistic scene in dramaturgy and modern music. The newly-founded institutions – the First Music School of Slovakia, 1919, the Slovak National Theatre, 1920, the Orchestra of Slovak Radio, 1929 – promoted the development of musical life and helped to overcome the provincialism and conservatism that had characterized the musical life of the city before World War I.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, in spite of his very good contacts with the exponents of Slovak public and cultural life (besides the above-mentioned composers, these included the critics Ivan Ballo and Gustáv Koričánsky), life in the new republic was not without problems for Albrecht. As a teacher at the Municipal School of Music and conductor of the Church Music Society, which was considered to be a traditional institution with a German and Hungarian membership, certain political circles regarded him as a competitor to the cultural institutions run by the state, and as a person who was not loyal enough politically. Some examples of this attitude towards him include the so-called issue with the national anthem,<sup>5</sup> or the police ban on the public presentation of the

<sup>3</sup><<http://www.foruminst.sk>> (accessed July 14, 2021).

<sup>4</sup>These statements appeared in short articles (“The First Czechoslovak Republic and Audience in Old Bratislava,” in Alexander ALBRECHT, *Túžby a spomienky (Desires and Memories)*, (Bratislava: Music Centre, 2008)).

<sup>5</sup>The centenary concert of the Church Music Society on November 6, 1933 opened with the national anthem played by a brass section of 8 members. The fact that the national anthem was performed without an introduction and without a conductor caused an uproar by the reviewer of the concert, Alexander Moyzes, who accused the director of the Church Music Society of disrespecting the symbols of the republic; see: Alexander MOYZES, “Slávnostní koncerty z příležitosti stáletého trvání CHS. . .,” *Lidové noviny* No. 563 (November 10, 1933), 7, or Veronika BAKIČOVÁ, *The Church Music Society at the Cathedral of St. Martin in Bratislava and Alexander Albrecht* (Bratislava: Music Forum, 2013), 149.



almost fully rehearsed *Psalmus Hungaricus* by Zoltán Kodály for national reasons (it was to be performed on November 24, 1929, along with the premiere of Albrecht's *Marienleben*).<sup>6</sup> *Psalmus Hungaricus* was performed merely as a rehearsal, and it was only heard at a public concert in Bratislava in 1968 (and then again in 1976).

#### 4. ALBRECHT'S MUSICAL LANGUAGE

As mentioned above, it was the romantic tradition that was the basis and the main source for the composer, but, in his works, he confronted it with contemporaneous trends in European music, especially in the field of harmony and tonality. The legacy of the past is most prominent in his treatment of themes and in his use of traditional forms. On the other hand, Albrecht's main principles in composition (and in interpretation) were sobriety<sup>7</sup> and economy in working with the musical material (no wonder that his favorite composers were Beethoven and Brahms), and expressivity. These traits of the composer, and his contact with modern European music, led to the crystallization of his approach into a kind of "de-subjectivization," in contrast with the romantic basis of subjective self-imagination.<sup>8</sup> At that time, however, it was the traditional approach to thematic treatment and form that resulted in the continuity of Albrecht's works and in the development of his musical language (one might even say that, from this point of view, the periods in the composer's work were mostly determined by the social and political changes he lived through.)

Albrecht came into touch with the most recent trends in European music in the first years of the twentieth century, or at the latest during his studies in Budapest. At this time, similarly to Bartók, Albrecht became interested in the music of Richard Strauss and Claude Debussy. Dramatism of expression, however, was foreign to the composer's personality (although some of its features and principles appeared in his later works, especially in *Marienleben*), as was impressionism, in which he missed thorough thematic treatment (he used some of the principles of working with sound e.g. in his ballad *Az Éj* (The Night) for voice and piano in 1922, setting to music Sándor Petőfi's poem). Later, he was also inspired by "Neue Sachlichkeit." Despite being influenced by so many completely different principles and trends, Albrecht actually remained romantic (and lyrical) until his death, and went through a very continuous and compact development, which he achieved by his cautious and sophisticated approach to the use of the different elements.

His relationship to folk music is also very interesting; especially with regard to his lifelong close friendship with Béla Bartók. In his inspiration by folk music, Bartók found a new approach to musical composition and expression, which was completely different from the romantic tradition. On the contrary, Albrecht focused on extending the spectrum of traditional tonal harmony and, in fact, he did not follow the principles of Bartók (specifically in his works from the 1920 and 1930s). Ultimately, Albrecht also arranged some folk songs – in 1934, he set five

<sup>6</sup>BAKIČOVÁ, *The Church Music Society at the Cathedral of St. Martin in Bratislava and Alexander Albrecht*, 127.

<sup>7</sup>"Temperance was not a monotony for him, but lent him a spontaneity (naturalism) which helped him to avoid insincere and pathetic aspects in composition." The composer's son, Ján Albrecht, described his father's principles in these words. See: Ján ALBRECHT, "Život a dielo Alexandra Albrechta očami syna," in ALBRECHT, *Túžby a spomienky*, 282.

<sup>8</sup>See: ALBRECHT, "Život a dielo Alexandra Albrechta," 280.



folk songs from the Spiš/Szepes region (*Zipser Lieder*) for high voice and piano (they were German folk songs of the Saxons from the Spiš/Szepes county) and, in 1941, *Eight Hungarian Folk Songs* for mixed choir; adaptations of Slovak folk songs only appeared among his works after World War II in various forms – as arrangements (*Three Slovak Folk Songs* for men's choir or mixed choir, 1948, *Eight Slovak Folk Songs* for children's choir or women's choir, 1950), stylized folk songs, which he used in his largest work of this period, the cantata *Šuhajko/The Swain*, for choir and orchestra, 1950. Albrecht used folk song inspirations in many of his instructive pieces, too. Generally, in this period, Albrecht's works<sup>9</sup> were dominated by arrangements of folk songs, new versions of his previous compositions, or works for the socialist agenda (*Jubilujúci SSSR/The Jubilant USSR*, for mixed choir or men's choir, based on a poem of Fraňo Král'). Other noteworthy compositions of his from that time include his *Humoresque (Trip in the Rain with a Tempest)*, 1949) and his works written for his son, Ján (*Suite Concertante for Viola and Piano*, 1952).

## 5. ALBRECHT IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Now, let us go back to the interwar period. The most significant aspect of social and cultural life at that time was the development of professional musical life in the city and an increased interest in modern music. As mentioned above, at that time, Albrecht developed his own way of musical expression and his own style, although he was very busy with his duties as the conductor and director of the Church Music Society, and this had a negative influence on the quantity of his works. Nevertheless, in the 1920s, he composed works which were considered to be among the most significant compositions of the time (especially in the Slovak part of the Czechoslovak Republic, before the formation of the new generation of Slovak composers in the second half of the 1930s), as the quality of these works was comparable to contemporaneous trends in the European context. Three compositions of his are outstanding in quality: the Piano Suite of 1924, *Sonatina for 11 Instruments*, 1925, and *Marienleben (The Life of Mary)*, *Three Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke*, 1928.

## 6. THE PIANO SUITE

The Piano Suite, in four movements (*Dance, Humoresque, Lullaby, and March*), is the work in which the composer's approach became crystallized. Its structural and idiomatic aspects show a prominent diversion from the romantic pathos, although the form is very traditional. This fact suggests an ideological purpose, present in most of his compositions – a structural and tonal innovation of the romantic, eventually neo-romantic, heritage without its complete negation. Despite its extensive technical difficulty, the “virtuoso” element is in the background, and this is in line with Albrecht's aims and demands for moderation and for the economy of the musical and expressive means. The structure of the piece is crystal clear. Despite a Regerian ideal, he tends to

<sup>9</sup>This period may be called the third period in Albrecht's work – from the viewpoint of the composer's continuous development, these works are probably the most audacious; the “ideological” changes in his works (the use of folk song elements, etc.) were caused by the ideological changes after World War II.



follow Bartók, although the expressive aggression of Bartók's works of that period was foreign to Albrecht. However, there are several traces of Bartók's influence in this work – first of all, it is a dance stylization with folk elements, more balladic or ritualistic in the first movement, and spontaneous in the final, fourth movement. Albrecht avoided any fashionable inspirations from popular music (as e.g. in Hindemith's *Dance Suite* from 1922). In general, Albrecht's *Piano Suite* is a piece with an outstanding concentration of the thematic material and a sophisticated structure.

The first movement, *Dance*, is in sonata form. The material of the main thematic complex is centralized in A, and the theme is divided into several motifs, which proceed to take part in the formal construction of the piece, similarly with the anticipation of the accompaniment (the first two bars of the movement), which shows the thematic ambitions. The harmonically less stable second thematic complex (centralized in B, from bar 33) brings a new, contrasting motif (see [Example 1](#)).

The development of this section contains the composer's expressive marks (*molto espressivo*, *ritenuto*, *a tempo tranquillo*, even *quasi improvisato*), which less correspond to the dance-like stylization indicated in the title of the movement. It is indeed a stylized dance, with a regular motion in quavers against a background of constantly changing metric structures. In the second thematic complex, there is an agogic, contrasting section. In the extensive development, which opens with a section in contrasting rhythm (*Tempo I, ma vivo*, bar 54), the composer works with the thematic material of the main theme (or thematic complex). The reprise is an inversion and opens with the material of the second thematic complex (in the beginning, it is centralized in D-flat, *Tempo II*, bar 103). While the material of the first thematic complex dominates the whole development, it is severely shortened in the recapitulation and represented only by the material of the first two bars of the movement ("anticipation of the accompaniment," covering four bars, *Tempo I*, bar 142). A short coda follows.

**Example 1.** Albrecht, *Piano Suite*, mov. I: *Dance*, bb. 33–36



In the second movement, *Humoresque*, the composer develops very concentrated thematic treatment. It is a short piece in song form, but the thematic structure itself, which results in “microtectonics,” is very interesting. The theme consists of several motifs, which are developed concisely during the piece. There is a dominating staccato motif in the first bar, then a two-bar motif centralized in D (bars 2 and 3), the ending quintuplet of which is used and developed further in the ending of section A (see [Example 2](#)). As part of thematic complex A, a staccato motif is again present from the very beginning, this time in free inversion (bar 4), and then the material derived from the first motif is immediately followed by its variation (bars 5–6 and 7–8). Subsequently, the staccato motif appears again in the range of one bar (as in the beginning, but a fourth higher), and a new segment enters, which anticipates the material and expression lines of the following section B (bars 10–11, or 12–13). The whole of section A is framed with the “second motif” (used in bars 2 and 3), this time centralized in C and followed by a cadenza. The concept of working with the thematic material is in line with that of Mozart. And the fact that the particular motifs are derived from both thematic complexes and then developed further points to the German tradition of concentrated thematic work. The short middle part (9 bars, bars 33–42) is based on changing the expression (*molto espressivo*, “with false pathos,” *scherzando*), and a glissando introduces the “Recapitulation section” in which Albrecht introduces the material of the “Exposition” relatively freely, but mostly in inversion – both in exposing the material and, often, in the melodic line, too (see [Example 3](#)). The shortened section B is followed by a longer coda, which centralizes the harmonic progression in D, using the motivic material of the first motif of the theme (see [Example 4](#)).

The third movement, *Lullaby*, lends a lyric element to the cycle. Albrecht dedicated it to the birth of the daughter of his colleague Štefan Németh-Šamorínsky (1896–1975, a Slovak composer of Hungarian origin, the conductor and the first performer of the Piano Suite). The movement begins with changing augmented chords and an exposition of an elegiac melody in

**Example 2.** Albrecht, Piano Suite, mov. II: *Humoresque*, bb. 29–30

**Example 3.** Albrecht, Piano Suite, mov. II: *Humoresque*, bb. 55–57





**Example 4.** Albrecht, Piano Suite, mov. II: *Humoresque*, bb. 88-98

which an augmented fourth points to the pseudo-folk character of the theme (see [Example 5](#)) (at that time, unlike Bartók, Albrecht did not use folk material, neither concrete melodies, nor modal principles). The main thematic material is derived from the initial motif (from bar 15) and builds up an extended section A (see [Example 6](#)). The motivic material of section B is also centralized in A-flat, but the melodic line departs from the descending movement (see [Example 7](#)). The recapitulation is again an inversion (sections B – A), and an extended coda joins and integrates both thematic complexes.

**Example 5.** Albrecht, Piano Suite, mov. III: *Lullaby*, bb. 1-8





**Example 6.** Albrecht, Piano Suite, mov. III: *Lullaby*, bb. 15–16

**Example 7.** Albrecht, Piano Suite, mov. III: *Lullaby*, bb. 31–33

The fourth movement, *March*, is conceived as a sonata-rondo. Three motivic segments can be separated from the thematic progression of the piece (the general scheme of the relatively extended form is A–B–C–B–A–C–A–coda). The introductory section is an extended gradation in a march-like stylization (see [Example 8](#)). Here, the composer omits the triplet figure (later processed in inversion in thematic complex C) and the melodic progression in seconds (in bar 6), which is actually the main constructional principle of all three thematic complexes. The introductory section builds up through 33 bars until the appearance of the main, expressive motif (see [Example 9](#)). The second thematic section uses the motif of a minor second and builds a contrast to the preceding thematic progression (Section A) in character. There is a stylization of a spontaneous folk element later used in the coda. Thematic complex C is a return to the stylized March (see [Example 10](#)). In the following progression, there is no more conflict of keys typical for the sonata principle or for sonata-rondo. The extended coda (bars 205–252) closes with a strong second motif from complex A, framing the movement thematically and the whole cycle harmonically (similarly to the first movement, the coda is centralized in A and the March ends with a triumphant A-major chord).

On the whole, the Piano Suite is an outstanding example of Albrecht's mature style and an implementation of his ideals in composition. It may be characterized as an attempt to fill a traditional form with new content. The work is full of lively optimism and spirited humor, and concentrates expression and form into a relatively short space. The title, Suite, implies a conjunction of contrasting dance movements but is a bit confusing. In its concept, it is a sonata



### 4. POCHOD

4 Con moto (♩ = 132)

pp

5 *pp ma poco marc.*

*cresc. poco a poco*

Example 8. Albrecht, Piano Suite, mov. IV: *March*, bb. 1-9

8

35

*ff*

*ff*

Example 9. Albrecht, Piano Suite, mov. IV: *March*, bb. 33-35

cycle – the first movement (*Dance*) is in the sonata form, the second movement (*Humoresque*)<sup>10</sup> is a scherzo, the third movement (*Lullaby*) is a lyrical, slow piece, and the fourth movement is a sonata-rondo. The tonal centralization of the movements is also traditional and based on the tones of a harmonic cadenza in A – the first movement in A ends with a chord without the third; the second one is centralized in D; the third one, both themes of which are centralized in A-flat, ends in E major; and the fourth movement is concluded with a coda, which centralizes the whole harmonic progression in A major. The fact that there is a centralization in A (or A minor) at the beginning of the cycle and in A major at the end is also very traditional and points to a pre-

<sup>10</sup>Albrecht, who in time became very critical of his previous works, mainly praised this second movement, and gave permission to perform the movement separately.



100

*pp*

*poco cresc.*

105

*cresc.* *mp* *p (sub.)* *dim.* *cresc.* *p*

**Example 10.** Albrecht, Piano Suite, mov. IV: *March*, bb. 100–105

romantic paradigm. Nevertheless, there are many audacious tonal and harmonic structures throughout the cycle, and this was actually the reason why the audience in Bratislava was not willing to accept the work when it was premiered, although there were also reviews which praised it.<sup>11</sup> At its first performance (on March 26, 1926, by Štefan Németh-Šamorínsky), the work was condemned, and the Slovak audience has only recently accepted and acknowledged its many positive attributes.

## 7. SONATINA FOR 11 INSTRUMENTS, OP. 25

Albrecht's Sonatina for 11 Instruments was composed in 1925 and represents the definitive crystallization of the composer's personal style, namely his characteristic approach – an effort to innovate traditional forms with new content, and with “unusual” instrumentation. The composer himself said:

The piece has a chamber-like character because every instrument is a soloist. It is for a string quintet and wind instruments: a flute, an oboe, a clarinet, 2 horns, and a bassoon. In this work, I wanted to achieve the most gentle and colorful timbres through mixing and changing the instruments and the instrumental groups, and especially through the application of the double-choir approach by a confrontation of the string and wind sections. Their progression arises from the principles of contrapuntal treatment, which is closest to the character of chamber music.<sup>12</sup>

Albrecht addressed the issue of sound in chamber compositions several times, naturally in the context of their traditional instrumentation; his Piano Quintet of 1913 and String Quartet in D

<sup>11</sup>“Albrecht is essentially a modern-day Schumann, with modern phraseology, but with the same desire to rhapsodize music. His Piano Suite is most Schumannesque in its ideological basis.” “a. h.,” “Večer skladieb Alex. Albrechta v Bratislave,” in *Slovenský denník* 9/73 (27 March, 1926), 1–2.

<sup>12</sup>ALBRECHT, *Túžby a spomienky*, 115.



Major, Op. 22, of 1918, were very successful pieces both at home and abroad. He handled the problem of orchestral composition successfully in his symphonic poem *The Sleeping Beauty* (*Dornröschen*) of 1921 and, later on, in works like *Marienleben* (1928), or in the symphonic poem *Tobias Wunderlich*, with the subtitle *Desires and Memories*, based on a legend by Hermann Heinz Ortner from 1935. Nevertheless, a composition for a chamber ensemble of solo instruments represents a real challenge and an extraordinarily difficult task for any composer – especially with respect to the balancing of the resulting sound, which is very different from the concept of a string quartet or a symphonic orchestra. By composing such a conceptually demanding work, Albrecht wrote a piece which directly joined the revolutionary act of Schoenberg in 1906 (the first version of *Kammersinfonie*, Op. 15) and which had no parallel in the Central European context in the 1920s.

The elegiac, lyrical first movement (*Lento*) is in sonata form. The main theme, played by the oboe, appears against the background of an E-flat played by the two horns, which also becomes a tonal center (see [Example 11](#)). The first thematic complex has a complicated structure, where the composer exposes the thematic material in different instrumental combinations, although still maintaining an extraordinary sensitivity for the individuality of each solo instrument. In harmony, he broadens the area of so-called extended tonality. The short section of the second theme (letters E and F in the score) is centralized in F-sharp, and the treatment of the instruments brings contrast – Albrecht juxtaposes the string and wind sections (see [Example 12](#)). Similarly to the exposition, the development (letter G) is introduced by syncopation in the horns on F-sharp, by which this progression acquires a structural function. In the extended development, the composer works mainly with the material of the first thematic complex, which he presents in several variations and combinations. The recapitulation brings a conceptually and instrumentally analogous section (letter L) and, with respect to harmony, there is no more conflict of key (the material of the second theme is centralized in E-flat, letter S).

The second movement, *Menuetto*, brings a contrasting character and points to classical models. But this “rococo” dance has a *fin de siècle* character, and even a program. From an interview with the composer, we know that the content of the Trio is a dialogue between a man and a woman at a ball: “she” (represented by the strings) falls in love, flirts, is intimate yet dismissive, and never completely sincere. “He” (characterized by the winds) also falls in love, is ardent, sincere, and declares his love to her. They talk in the corridor where the noise of the ball is

Lento (♩ = 48) Prvé takty klůdnejšie (♩ = 46)

**Example 11.** Albrecht, *Sonatina*, mov. I, bb. 1–6





between the different characters, which he draws as a contrast of the string and wind sections, although this is relatively irrelevant for the progression of the piece. It could also be a glimpse into the composer’s private sphere (maybe it is based on the composer’s own experience).

The third movement (Vivace) is written in free sonata-rondo form and brings some new contrasts. In the first thematic complex, Albrecht presents an expressive theme by the clarinet and the bassoon against the background of a tremolo of the strings. The theme is based on the interval of a diminished fifth (D–A-flat) or augmented fourth (A–D-sharp). These intervals play an important role throughout the movement (which otherwise ends with the interval of A–E-flat in the sordino pizzicato of the lower strings; see Example 14). The subsequent course of the first thematic group and “development” turns grotesque, which is in enormous contrast to the main theme. The second theme (Andante moderato, letter D) has a rhapsodic character and is marked by metric and agogic changes and a conflict of key – contrary to the first

Vivace (♩ = 132)

The musical score for Example 14, Albrecht's Sonatina, movement III, measures 1-12, is presented in a five-staff format. The top staff is for Oboe and Clarinet B, the second for Bassoon and Horns in F, the third for Violins 1 and 2 and Viola, and the bottom two for Violoncello and Contrabasso. The tempo is marked 'Vivace' with a quarter note equal to 132 beats per minute. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The first system shows the woodwinds entering with a melodic line marked *mp*, while the strings provide a tremolo accompaniment marked *p*. The second system continues the melodic development, featuring dynamics such as *mp*, *poco cresc.*, and *sf*, along with *trem.* markings for the strings.

Example 14. Albrecht, Sonatina, mov. III, bb. 1-12



thematic group centralized in E-flat, it remains in A (see [Example 15](#)). The rondo-like character of the third movement is accentuated by the exposition of the second theme in the central part of the development, this time in F (Tempo II, letter K). The recapitulation (letter P) brings instrumental variations and an exposition of the second theme without a conflict of key (in E-flat).

The work, condemned in Bratislava because of its audacious harmonic style, was appreciated mostly by foreign experts. During one of its performances in Bratislava under the baton of the composer, the famous Romanian conductor, George Georgescu (1887–1964), asked for the score and, later, the famous Czech conductor Václav Talich (1883–1961) often performed the Sonatina. As the first chief conductor of the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, Talich included the piece in the program of one of their opening concerts, declaring that “it is one of the most

Andante moderato  
(♩ = 66)

The musical score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Flauto, Oboe, Clarinetto B, Fagotto, Corni in F, Violino 1, Violino 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabbasso. The music is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into three measures. The first measure is marked 'D' and has a tempo of Andante moderato (♩ = 66). The second measure is marked 'D' and has a tempo of Andante moderato. The third measure is marked 'D' and has a tempo of Andante moderato. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *p*, *mp*, and *cresc.*, and performance instructions such as *con affetto*.

**Example 15.** Albrecht, Sonatina, mov. III, bb. 51–56







harmonic style, although it does not follow the trend of the previous works of the composer in every aspect – especially in the “de-romanticization” of the musical and compositional material and in the “de-subjectivization” of the composition. On the other hand, “romantic” expressivity is a very important element of the work. This fusion proved to be suitable and acceptable for the audience, which applauded the premiere of the piece. Nevertheless, Albrecht did not reduce his demands and aspirations. It is important to note that this was the composer’s favorite work.

*Marienleben* is a cycle of 15 poems written by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) at the age of 37, obviously without any religious motive (both Rilke and Albrecht were non-believers).<sup>15</sup> The cycle depicts the life and sufferings of the mother of Jesus based on a series of woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1526). Rilke was born in Prague, and the contemporaneous nationalistic movement was not unknown to him (for instance, he changed his original name René to Rainer). He did not live to see the cataclysm brought about by nationalistic ideas. Near the end of his life, Rilke demonstrated his political orientation by his admiration for Mussolini, whom he considered to be a politician of the new style. Several times, he expressed the idea that the use of violence by the state was permissible.<sup>16</sup> Not reflecting his political views and errors (maybe it was partially more comprehensible in the complicated political situation after World War I), Rilke’s works present progressive artistic ambitions, and his poetry, on the border of symbolism and expressionism, acquired many admirers and inspired many musicians. Rilke’s poetry was set to music by such personalities as Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Schreker, Hindemith, Weill, Martin, Busoni, Shostakovich and Penderecki. As mentioned above, his short expressive poem *Pietà* (No. 11 in the original series) inspired Albrecht in 1917, in the third year of the war. Albrecht was introduced to Rilke’s poetry by his brother-in-law, Dr. Richard Messer (who was a professor at the Grammar School in Bratislava at that time), an expert in literature and fine arts. The captivating way of Messer’s lectures stimulated Albrecht to explore Rilke’s poetry and, in his own words, to write the best composition of his life. In his article “About My Short Life” in 1957, Albrecht described the magical moment of his first inspiration by this captivating text:

Something strange happened. Music of a mysterious feeling descended over me. I wrote down some bars without knowing what I could do with them. Suddenly, I felt that the music which sounded in my mind corresponded to the feelings of *The Birth of Maria*, the first poem in the *Marienleben* cycle. I set to work, and the best composition of my life (as I hope) was born.<sup>17</sup>

The composer’s choice of texts to be set to music is very interesting. Rilke’s cycle contains 15 poems:

*Geburt Mariae*

*Die Darstellung Mariae im Tempel*

*Mariae Verkündigung*

*Mariae Heimsuchung*

<sup>15</sup>ALBRECHT, *Túžby a spomienky*, 19.

<sup>16</sup>For Rilke’s pronouncements about Mussolini and Italian fascism see: Rainer Maria RILKE, *Lettres Milanaises: 1921–1926* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1956), 84 and following, eventually 184–186.

<sup>17</sup>ALBRECHT, *Túžby a spomienky*, 35.



*Argwohn Josephs*

*Verkündigung über den Hirten*

*Geburt Christi*

*Rast auf der Flucht in Ägypten*

*Von der Hochzeit zu Kana*

*Von der Passion*

*Pietà*

*Stillung Mariae mit dem Auferstandenen*

*Vom Tode Mariae I, II, III*

Albrecht chose three poems: “Three very beautiful poems from this cycle were chosen and combined into a logical unit.”<sup>18</sup> He selected the first poem (*Geburt Mariae*), then he inserted *Pietà* (originally the 11th poem in Rilke’s cycle), which he had set to music already in 1917, as the second piece, and *Vom Tode Mariae II* (the second of a group of three poems at the end of Rilke’s cycle) about Mary’s death as the third piece. The poems picked by Albrecht are symbolical and they lack epic elements (in fact, the whole cycle is “symbolical,” with expressive elements rather than epic ones, despite the titles of each poem being based on concrete, “epic” stories). For both Rilke and Albrecht, feelings and impressions were more important, as he also mentioned in the quotation above, and the composer’s aim was to capture and musically express the most important moments in Mary’s life – the birth of her son, her sufferings and her death, and her Assumption.

The whole concept of the composition is close to an oratorio, and the composer himself called the work an “oratorio” for solo soprano, choir, and orchestra,<sup>19</sup> although he ultimately adopted a simple subtitle, *Three Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke*. All three poems are interconnected in their settings, although they have their own clear contours and contrasting musical expressions. The first and the third poems are conceived for a choir, whereas the middle setting is for solo soprano. This was probably caused not only by the fact that the *Pietà* had been written (originally also for solo soprano) ten years earlier; a more relevant reason was to achieve a change in the character of each poem. The peripheral texts have a positive expression and mood – the birth of the Son, and death, which is also positive here; according to Church doctrine, Mary was assumed into Heaven in body, and her assumption was an entrance into eternal beatitude. On the contrary, the central song depicts the most tragic moment in Mary’s life, the crucifixion of her son. That was probably the reason why Albrecht used the solo soprano of his original *Pietà* of 1917 (although there are some changes in melodic line and musical structure after the instrumentation) – the solo voice suited the intense expressivity of this passage best.

In the process of composition, Albrecht divided the individual poems into some kind of “ideological cells” and joined them together by interludes. Their aim is to express the feeling and character of the verses. This can be demonstrated in the first poem:

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>ALBRECHT, *Túžby a spomienky*, 117.



*O was muss die Engel gekostet haben,  
nicht aufzusingen plötzlich, wie man aufweint,  
da sie doch wussten: || in dieser Nacht wird dem Knaben  
die Mutter geboren, dem Einen, der bald erscheint.*

||

*Schwingend verschwiegen sie sich und zeigten die Richtung,  
Wo, allein, das Gehöft lag des Joachim,  
Ach, sie fühlten in sich und im Raum die reine Verdichtung,  
Aber es durfte keiner wieder zu ihm.*

||

*Denn die beiden waren schon so ausser sich vor Getue.  
Eine Nachbarin kam und klagte und wusste nicht wie,  
Und der Alte, vorsichtig, ging und verhielt das Gemuhe  
einer dunkelen Kuh. || Denn so war es noch nie.*

I inserted double vertical lines to point out the division into sections used by Albrecht in his composition (the original poem was not divided into sections). In fact, the division is very regular (every four lines) and, in addition, the composer further divided the first section to accentuate the words “in dieser Nacht wird dem Knaben die Mutter geboren.” In a similar way, he isolated the sentence “Denn so war es noch nie” in the closing section, which is actually an ideological conclusion of the poem (and of the song). There is only an ideological change in the short poem *Pietà* – the short song is truly a concentrated expression of a mother’s suffering. The demanding expressivity was probably the reason why the poet departed from the principle of a regular, “legible” verse. There is an interlude, which Albrecht used for dividing the last sentence of the poem, again for reasons of the accentuation of the ideological conclusion:

*Jetzt liegst du quer durch meinen Schooss,  
Jetzt kann ich dich nicht mehr gebären.*

The third poem is the longest one, containing 31 verses, to the contrary of both preceding poems, which consist only of 12 lines. The long text was set by Albrecht without the strong musical changes he used before. The declamation of the text is important, more than in the interludes, which depict the character changes and feelings; these are really short in this section. These short interludes divide the whole poem into three sections of similar length – there is a short interlude after the 8th line, and then again after the 18th line, which is the most dramatic section of the piece, culminating in the words “Engel geblendet aufschrie: Wer ist die? Ein Staunen war.” Here, there is a cry by the choir followed by a general pause. The piece has a multiple ending – the last segments of the poem are divided by rests, and the last segment is again an ideological conclusion of the poem and of the whole cycle, now in an epic form.



This results from the above-mentioned fact that the composition and its structure are strongly determined by the verses and by the ideological changes of the segments of the poems. Although the verses are relatively regular, Albrecht actually used a free song form while respecting the main principles of composition – the principle of free recapitulation, gradation, etc. – and avoided the formal diffusion of the text and the musical sections, which helped him to maintain the coherence of the whole work.

The relatively free formal context also points to the structure of German orchestral songs rather than that of oratorios. As mentioned above, the composer was inspired mainly by the symbolism of Rilke's original texts and by the feelings evoked by this poetry. The epic line, which is such an important part of oratorios, was not essential for him, although it is present in the work. Also, the musical forces used for the poems – solo soprano and choir – did not reflect a musico-dramatic concept, but, rather, the contrast between positive and negative feelings.

The first poem, *Geburt Mariae*, begins with a waving triplet moving in  $\frac{3}{8}$  time. Here Albrecht used his favorite key, B-major,<sup>20</sup> which he often chose to express calmness and peace. Combined with the triplet movement, it expresses the calm but joyful waiting of Mary for the birth of her son, Jesus. After a short prelude (7 bars), the first passage of the choir appears ("O, was muss die Engel gekostet haben"). This short section (also 7 bars) contains the calm beginning of a melodic line, which is followed by a sudden leap (a minor sixth and a major second) highlighted with a metrical change ( $\frac{2}{4}$  to  $\frac{12}{8}$ , "um nicht aufzusingen"). The following 2 bars bring a calming down ("Plötzlich, wie man aufweint"), accentuated by the instrumentation – in contrast to the orchestral tutti at the top of the melodic line, there is a subtle passage for strings and woodwinds (oboe, clarinets, and bassoons) here (see [Example 16](#)). The character changes during this short, highly expressive melodic line are typical of the composer. The second passage of the choir ("in dieser Nacht") is prepared with an interlude, where the *Andante poco mosso* (letter C in the score) brings a change in the musical character (from  $\frac{12}{8}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$ ). The proportions of this short choral passage are very similar to the preceding one – an ascending, chromatic melodic line, then a shocking climax – a leap from the B of the altos to the A<sup>2</sup> of the sopranos on the word "dem Einem;" this word is directly accentuated by the composer through the *ff* of the choir in unison, which also brings a contrast to the preceding, elaborated structure of the choral part (see [Example 17](#)).

After the subsequent interlude (4 bars, letter E, *Più mosso*), which brings an impressionistic treatment of the sound (parallel fifths by the flutes, etc.), an extensive choral passage begins ("Schwingend verschwiegen"). The gradually expanded structure (the second section of the poem) is underlined with clear and subtle instrumentation. At the end, the composer prepares a thematically new, contrasting section, which is introduced by a strong motoric motif which is played by the second violins (letter J, *Andante agitato, energico*; see [Example 18](#)). This relatively short section, with an imitative technique, underlines the excitement around the birth of the child and brings a contrast to the preceding process. The last words of the poem are set to music for the choir in unison ("Denn so war es noch nie"). This concludes the whole first movement. Analogously to the preceding processes, the composer uses a bigger leap to accentuate the important words ("nie/never" from A-flat<sup>1</sup> to G-flat<sup>2</sup> in the soprano; see [Example 19](#)). The

<sup>20</sup>See: Ľubomír CHALUPKA, "Alexander Albrecht. Tri básne z cyklu Marienleben R. M. Rilkeho pre soprán, miešaný zbor a orchester," *Hudobný život* 26/4 (1999), 13–16.



*poco animato* (♩ = 77)

2 FI  
FI 3  
2 Ob  
Cl I  
Cl II  
2 Fg  
1, 2  
3, 4 Cor Fa  
3 Tr in Sp  
Tp  
Ar  
S  
A  
T  
B  
Vn I  
Vn II  
VI  
Vc  
Cb

um nicht auf - zu - sin - gen plötz - lich, wie man auf - weint,  
um nicht auf - zu - sin - gen plötz - lich, wie man auf - weint,  
um nicht auf - zu - sin - gen plötz - lich, wie man auf - weint,  
um nicht auf - zu - sin - gen plötz - lich, wie man auf - weint,

*poco animato* (♩ = 77)

*poco cresc.*  
*div.*  
*poco cresc.*  
*poco cresc.*  
*poco cresc.*

Example 16. Albrecht, *Marienleben*, "Geburt Mariae," bb. 11–14



S  
in die - ser Nacht wird dem Kna - ben die

A  
in die - ser Nacht wird dem Kna - ben die

T  
in die - ser Nacht wird dem Kna - ben die

B  
in die - ser Nacht wird dem Kna - ben die

S  
Mut - ter ge - bo - ren, dem Ei - nen, der bald er - scheint.

A  
Mut - ter ge - bo - ren, dem Ei - nen, der bald er - scheint.

T  
Mut - ter ge - bo - ren, dem Ei - nen, der bald er - scheint.

B  
Kna - ben die Mut - ter ge - bo - ren, dem Ei - nen, der bald er - scheint.

Example 17. Albrecht, *Marielenben*, “Geburt Mariae,” bb. 27-33

61 J Andante agitato, energico (♩ = 88) K

Vn I  
*f*

Vn II  
*f*

VI  
*f*

Vc  
*f*

Cb  
*f*

Example 18. Albrecht, *Marielenben*, “Geburt Mariae,” bb. 61-65



S *p* *dim. sin al Fine*  
 Denn so war es noch nie  
 A *p* *dim. sin al Fine*  
 Denn so war es noch nie  
 T *p* *dim. sin al Fine*  
 Denn so war es noch nie  
 B *p* *dim. sin al Fine*  
 Denn so war es noch nie

**Example 19.** Albrecht, *Marienenleben*, “Geburt Mariae,” bb. 84–87

composer thematically and harmonically frames the first movement with a short interlude with the material of the opening section and a subsequent harmonic cadenza.

Albrecht changes the tonal area of the subsequent *Pietà* very easily by only shifting the tone B to C (viola and second violin). As mentioned above, this piece was composed in 1917 in response to World War I. In fact, this movement is very different from the peripheral movements of the whole composition, and the effect is expressed by the expressive melodic line of the solo soprano and by rich harmony, both serving the highly tragic expression. For the harmonic progression, it is characteristic that the tonic appears only at the end of the movement, and there are many temporary tonal centers in the form of seventh chord structures. This can be viewed also as an advanced “Vorhaltstechnik.”

The beginning of the opening phrase of the song is presented by the solo soprano. The melodic line is very expressive, underlined by bigger leaps followed by stepwise movement in the same way ( $A^1-G^2-A\text{-flat}^2$ ). Albrecht mostly uses such progression in highly expressive passages. There is an inverted progression in the second verse – a descending leap of a seventh (see [Example 20](#)). The form is freer than the structure of the poem, and the verses are more irregular (mostly only short sentences are used). The formal progression can be divided into three sections. The second section begins in a similar way as the first one – it is dominated by the solo soprano (“Hart wie ich bin,” 3 bars before C). Albrecht again uses a bigger leap, this time an eleventh (from  $F^1$  to  $B\text{-flat}^2$ ) on the words “Du wurdest gross” (see [Example 21](#)). New thematic material, which becomes the basis of a large orchestral interlude, appears shortly afterwards. The dynamic peak of the piece, the rhythmization, and the melodic step (of a minor second) on the last word of the verse (“hinauszustehen”) become the dominating motif in the brass section, and

S *p* *mf* *mf*  
 Jetzt wird mein E - - - lend voll, und na - men - los er - füllt es

**Example 20.** Albrecht, *Marienenleben*, “Pietà,” bb. 8–14





S s

Hart wie ich bin, weiß ich nur Eins: Du wurdest groß, \_\_\_\_\_

*cresc. molto* *ff*

**Example 21.** Albrecht, *Marienleben*, “Pietà,” bb. 20–24

an important rhythmic element is presented by the kettledrum. The third section is introduced by this motif from the beginning of the movement in the same harmonic context (with respect to form, the middle movement of the “oratorio” is framed by the peripheral movements, which are based on an expressive presentation of the melody by the solo soprano with an animated middle movement). The solo soprano presents the last verse, which concludes the poem (“Jetzt liegst du quer durch meinen Schooss, jetzt kann ich dich nicht gebären,” letter G). The concept of the melodic line is similar to the beginning of the middle movement – bigger melodic leaps are combined with steps in seconds; at the very end, there is a melisma on the word “gebären” (see [Example 22](#)).

The third movement, *Vom Tode Mariae*, the longest song of the cycle, begins in the same harmonic area. It opens with a tremolo of the high strings, which becomes the basis for the muted trombone (with the clarinet). It brings material with a characteristic rhythmic structure, a dotted triplet rhythm, traditionally connected with the effect of joy and delight. Albrecht immediately adds, in an antithetical way, new material – triplets in the high range of the flutes and in high strings –, evoking a celestial sphere by its character and expression (see [Example 23](#)). The following harmonic changes lead us again to B major (as in the first movement), by which the tonal unity of the cycle is achieved – the peripheral movements are centralized in B, the middle movement in C. The whole is not framed only by harmony; the structure, the general character, and the idioms of the melodic lines of the peripheral movements are also similar. The quantity and the ideological richness of the text predetermine the musical quality of the song. The whole progression is marked by a slow and consistent gradation, elaborated efficiently and interestingly in a microtectonic sense (the above-mentioned bigger leaps in the melodic line stand in contrast with the unison of the choir, there are polyrhythmic structures – the choir moves in  $\frac{2}{2}$  the orchestra in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, whole-tone scales, etc.). The peak of the piece (“Wer ist die?,” 1 bar before H, *Allegro moderato*) uses almost music-dramatic principles – general pauses, appeals of the choir, subsequent *pp* effect, and an interesting use of contrast also by the parallel fifths of the choir on the words “Ein Staunen war” (see [Example 24](#)). The closing section (*Andante poco sostenuto*, *Pomposo*, letter M) is introduced by an ostinato bass figure in the horns, harp, piano and violoncellos, and the second bar begins with a harmonically stable rhapsodic melody in the higher strings, while the choral phrase “Die Engel aber nahmen Sie zu sich” adds to the concluding gradation. Nevertheless, the composer restores calm in the piece again before its very end (letter O, *Poco più mosso*), where the choir sings the concluding words of the poem (“und tragen sie das letzten Stück empor”), a kind of fundamental line for the whole work. The orchestral postlude again presents an expressive melody by the brass winds, in contrast to the chordal structures in the flutes, celesta, harp and piano in a high register, evoking an exalted, eternal character.



2 Ob  
Cor I  
Fa  
Cl I  
Sib  
Cl 2  
Sib  
Cl b  
Sib  
2 Fg  
S s  
Vn I  
Vn II  
Vi  
Vc

*mp* *cresc. più* *p*

*mp* *cresc. più*

*mp* *(poco)* *poco più f* *cresc. più*

*mp* *(poco)* *poco più f* *cresc. più*

*mp* *(poco)* *cresc. più*

*mp* *(poco)*

*(brevis)* *G* *p* Jetzt liegst Du

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

**Example 22.** Albrecht, *Marienleben*, “Pietà,” bb. 46–52

*Marienleben* brought not only the joy of the compositional process to Albrecht,<sup>21</sup> but also, as mentioned above, acknowledgement in his hometown, which had previously received his works very coldly. The famous Czech composer and conductor Oskar Nedbal, who was present at the premiere of *Marienleben* conducted by Albrecht, said to the journalists that Albrecht was the greatest composer of oratorios in Czechoslovakia.<sup>22</sup> In any case, it is the greatest oratorio composed in the Slovak milieu in the interwar period. For Albrecht himself, it represented the peak of his ambitions from the aspect of compositional techniques as well as expression. In principle, it is a typical work of synthesis, although Albrecht did not abandon the German tradition (unlike Bartók), but showed great interest in the latest modern trends, especially in

<sup>21</sup>For more on this, see the essay “Tvorenie – z pohľadu zvnútra/Creation – From the Inner Perspective,” in ALBRECHT, *Túžby a spomienky*, 197–203.

<sup>22</sup>ALBRECHT, *Túžby a spomienky*, 35.



47

poco animato poco rit. tempo 1.

2 Fl

2 Ob

Cor i

Cl 1 in Sp

Cl 2 in Sp

Cl b in Sp

2 Fg

Cor 1,2

S s

quer durch mei - nen Schooß, jetzt kann ich dich nicht mehr ge - bä - ren

S s

Jetzt liegst Du

**Example 22. (Continuation)**

expressionism and impressionism, and used some of their elements and methods. Moreover, he conceived this outstanding instrumentation in a romantic way, but with innovations taken from contemporaneous music. The character of his work is completely different from Paul Hindemith’s song-cycle *Marienleben* of 1922 (the second version, in which several of the songs were instrumented, is from 1948; Hindemith set to music Rilke’s entire cycle). Hindemith’s version of Rilke’s poems is conceived very progressively, using the principles of “Neue Sachlichkeit,” which is characterized by a conciseness of the phraseology. Albrecht was probably unaware of Hindemith’s composition.<sup>23</sup>

Despite all its qualities, *Marienleben* has still not become a stable part of Slovak cultural life, as can be seen from its rare presence on the concert scene. It was performed relatively often at the concerts of the Church Music Society (1930, 1933, 1941, and 1943),<sup>24</sup> but, under the new

<sup>23</sup>Lubomír CHALUPKA, *Cestami k tvorivej profesionalite. Sprievodca slovenskou hudbou 20. storočia I. (On the Way to Creative Professionalism. A Guide to 20th-Century Slovak Music)* (Bratislava: Music Foundation, 2015), 120.

<sup>24</sup>Veronika BAKIČOVÁ, *Cirkevny hudobny spolok pri Dóme sv. Martina v Bratislave and Alexander Albrecht* (Bratislava: Music Forum, 2013), 127.



Andante mosso (♩ = 86)

2 Flauti

Flauto 3

2 Oboi

Clarinetto 1 in Si<sup>b</sup>

Clarinetto 2 in Si<sup>b</sup>

3 Trombe in Si<sup>b</sup>

Andante mosso (♩ = 86)

Violini I

Violini II

Viole

Violoncelli

### Example 23. Albrecht, *Marienleben*, "Vom Tode Mariae," bb. 1–6

conditions after 1945, it was aired only once – in 1985, on the occasion of the centenary of Albrecht's birth, although with a changed title, *Three Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke* (which was actually its subtitle; the original title, *Marienleben*, was still unacceptable at that time). Two concerts (on December 18 and 19, 1985) were played by the Slovak Philharmonic, with Magdaléna Hajóssyová as the soloist and Ľudovít Rajter as the conductor, and these were preceded by a recording of the work, with the same performers, released as part of Albrecht's profile LP; later, it was released as a CD by the Musica Publishing House.<sup>25</sup> The planned performance of

<sup>25</sup>Information from the database of the Slovak Philharmonic was made available to me by the dramaturge of the Slovak Philharmonic, Dr. Juraj Bubnáš.



larga **H** Allegro molto moderato animato  $\text{♩} = 92$

2 Fl  
Flp  
2 Ob  
Cor I  
Fa  
Cl1  
in SP  
Cl2  
in SP  
2 Fg  
Cfb  
1.2  
4 Cor  
Fa  
3.4  
3 Tr  
in SP  
2 Tn  
Tn b  
Tu  
Tp  
Tpc  
Tpc  
Ph  
Org  
S  
A  
T  
B  
Vin I  
Vin II  
VI  
Vc  
Cb

blen - det auf - schrie: Wer ist die? Ein Stau - - - nen  
blen - det auf - schrie: Wer ist die? Ein Stau - - - nen  
blen - det auf - schrie: Wer ist die? Ein Stau - - - nen  
blen - det auf - schrie: Wer ist die? Ein Stau - - - nen

Flauto piccolo muta 3. Flauto

con sord.

mp  
mf  
f  
pp  
ff

dim.

**H** Allegro molto moderato animato

Example 24. Albrecht, *Marienleben*, "Vom Tode Mariae," bb. 51-55



this composition in the current season has been cancelled because of the pandemic. I hope this outstanding work, much loved by its composer and praised by critics, too, will soon be performed to the contemporary audience.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup>This study came into being as part of the following VEGA project No. 2/0040/18: Musical Theatre in Bratislava from the Second Half of the 19th Century to the First Half of the 20th Century (Personalities, Institutions, Repertoire, Reflections) carried out at the Department of Musicology at Comenius University.

