



Foto: Oliver Borchert

SECRETS OF FRAGMENTS PIANO 4 HANDS

ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG & ALEXANDRE TANSMAN

[1] Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951)
Fragment from “Phantasia” for Piano
Four Hands (1937) **1:32**

[2] Alexandre Tansman (1897-1986)
“La Danse de la Sorcière”
Ballet fragment from “Le Jardin du
paradis” in the version for Piano Four
Hands (1923) **4:56**

Arnold Schönberg, Fragment from the “Phantasia” for Piano Four Hands (1937)

Arnold Schoenberg was born on September 13, 1874, in Vienna and was one of the most significant composers of the 20th century. He developed new musical ideas and is considered the founder of twelve-tone music. Initially, he wrote late Romantic music, rooted in the tradition of Gustav Mahler, Johannes Brahms, and Richard Wagner.

In 1908, he broke away from traditional tonality and experimented with new sound structures. From the early 1920s onward, he developed dodecaphony. In 1933, he emigrated to the United States due to Nazi persecution. There he worked as a music teacher and composer and died on July 13, 1951, in Los Angeles. In the 1930s, Schoenberg returned to more traditional forms and structures. His music remained modern, but became somewhat more accessible to listeners.

In preparation for the major Arnold Schoenberg anniversary year in 2023, we inquired at the Arnold Schoenberg Center in Vienna whether there were any other works for four hands, besides those already known, that had not been published and that we could perform. We were thankfully provided with the digital score of this fragment of the Phantasia, recorded here for the first time, along with the note that it is a work of unknown provenance. It lasts one and a half minutes and dates from 1937.

When we engage deeply with musical works because they must be studied and rehearsed, they automatically become an important part of our lives. We analyze the works and try to contextualize them both within music history and the composer’s biography. We quickly noticed that the structure of the composition is extremely clear and logical:

Two themes appear in all voices in canon, twice and with the hands completely reversed. The clear four-part structure is so striking that we suspect this might be a study for a string quartet—in the same sense that painters create drawing studies to prepare for oil paintings.

In any case, it was a great priority for us and the Arnold Schönberg Center to make this little compositional gem accessible to the public.

Alexandre Tansman, “La Danse de la Sorcière”, a ballet fragment from “Le Jardin du Paradis” in the version for piano four hands

Alexandre Tansman (1897–1986) was a French composer and pianist of Polish-Russian-Jewish descent. Born in Łódź, he moved to Paris in 1919; in 1927 and 1929, he undertook concert tours throughout the United States as a pianist, conductor, and composer. In 1940, Tansman and his family managed to flee from Marseille via Lisbon to the United States. They settled in Hollywood, Los Angeles. There, he became close friends with Igor Stravinsky and earned his living primarily through film music.

In 1946, he was nominated for the “Oscar for Best Original Score” for the film “Paris Underground.” Nevertheless, the family returned to Paris as early as 1946—mainly due to homesickness.

After the war, Tansman was unable to build on his earlier successes; to this day, he is best known for his many educational compositions for piano, which were and remain widely used in France. Tansman died in Paris at the age of 89.

The piece we have recorded, “La Danse de la Sorcière,” is a fragment from the ballet “Le Jardin du Paradis.” The literary source is the fairy tale of the same name by Hans Christian Andersen, specifically the scene in which the king’s son, after being set down in the Garden of Paradise by the East Wind, dances with the sorceress, knowing that he must not kiss her, for: “...but if you press a kiss upon my lips, Paradise will sink deep into the earth, and it will be lost to you. The desert’s sharp wind will sweep around you, the cold rain will drip from your head. Sorrow and tribulation will be your lot.” – And so it happens –, perfectly conveyed in the music.

The composition is of great wildness, marked by distinct rhythm and a surging soundscape, deeply rooted in the musical language of the 20th century. The ballet “Le Jardin du Paradis,” composed in 1922 and originally consisting of four scenes, was likely never performed and no longer survives in its entirety. The first extracted concert version of the “Danse de la Sorcière” for orchestra was created as early as 1923 and was performed in Zurich in 1926 (International Society for Contemporary Music, as part of the IVth ISCM World New Music Days, June 18–23).

However, the earliest printed edition was the four-hand version from 1924. A chamber music version in the typical French sextet format—piano and wind quintet—has also survived.

Text by Friederike Haufe

Piano Duo Friederike Haufe – Volker Ahmels

Worldwide research and “discovery” of composers (and of their works) who were hindered by the Nazi-Regime in exercising their artistic profession, who were driven into exile or were deported and murdered in extermination camps, are some of the main topics in the lives of both these artists.

Their first meeting in 1998 in Israel, with pianist Edith Kraus gave rise to their intense preoccupation with “Ostracized Music“, until then a largely unknown theme. Edith Kraus had been the youngest student in Artur Schnabel’s Berlin Masterclass, after which she began a promising career in Prague. In 1943 she was deported to Theresienstadt concentration camp, where she was one of the most prominent musicians. Right up to Edith Kraus’ death in 2013, Friederike Haufe and Volker Ahmels stayed in regular touch with her.



Foto: Oliver Borchert

Piano duo Friederike Haufe Volker Ahmels recorded their first CD for Medien Kontor Hamburg in 2006, with Franz Schubert's famous F minor Fantasy, Franz Liszt's symphonic poem "Les Préludes" in the rarely played version by the composer himself, for four hands, as well as the piano waltzes for four hands "devised" by Wolfgang Rihm. In 2012 a CD titled "Der Ochse auf dem Dach und andere Verbote" (The Ox on the Roof and further banned music) featuring works by Darius Milhaud, Hans Gál, Arnold Schönberg, Leo Smit, Erwin Schulhoff and Ernst Toch was published in Vienna by Gramola.

These new recordings from 2025, presented here, follow directly on from those earlier works. Gramola previously produced Hans Gál's "Marionettes" with the piano duo Friederike Haufe and Volker Ahmels. With this latest recording of the "Serbian Melodies," their complete four-hand works are now available in their interpretation. This is also the case with Arnold Schoenberg, whose early "6 Pieces" were released on this CD at the time. His "Fragment of the Phantasia" now completes this composer's four-hand oeuvre. In "Secrets of Fragments," it is juxtaposed with the ballet fragment "La Danse de la Sorcière" from "Le Jardin du Paradis" by Alexandre Tansman. Friederike Haufe and Volker Ahmels have included this work in their concert repertoire since 2007.

As from 2016 the piano duo began promoting the publication and the renewed performance of works by Hamburg born composer Ingolf Dahl, who had been forced to emigrate to Los Angeles because of his Jewish roots. They found Dahl's piano manuscripts for four hands amongst his estate at the USC archives. In 2017 Medien Kontor Hamburg in cooperation with the Centre for Ostracized Music at the Rostock Academy of Music and Theatre published these works as a scientific first edition of Dahl's complete piano music for four hands. The première of Dahl's "Four Intervals" can be heard played by Friederike Haufe and Volker Ahmels on the CD called "Ingolf Dahl Intervals" that was published by the same cooperation.

Since 2014, the four-hand piano piece by Dutch composer Dick Kattenburg has been part of their concert repertoire. They have performed it on multiple occasions in Hamburg and Amsterdam, as well as in Los Angeles and Vienna, and recorded it in 2021 for Donemus Amsterdam. At the International Festival of Forbidden Music in Schwerin, they performed the world premiere of the 1938 "Overture for Two Pianos, Op. 3 No. 1," which is heard for the first time on this CD and was nominated for the Opus Klassik award in 2022 as the "world premiere recording."

At the same time, Donemus Amsterdam released a new edition of all the scores for this instrumentation, edited by Friederike Haufe and Volker Ahmels.

They met at a young age whilst studying the piano with Bernard Wambach. Internationally renowned for his interpretations of contemporary music, this later professor at the Folkwang Arts Academy in Essen, inspired a deep and lasting interest in 20th Century music in both young pianists.

In 1996 they joined forces to form a piano duo for their first international appearance in Israel and the autonomous Palestinian territories. In both parts of Jerusalem, in Tel Aviv and Haifa, as well as in Bethlehem and Ramallah they gave performances of piano works for four hands of the classic and romantic periods. Later they also included works for two pianos in their repertoire, such as Mozart's complete opus for this combination and Bach's piano concerto in C major BWV 1061, that they performed at the Schwerin Theatre with the Chamber Orchestra of the Mecklenburgische Staatskapelle. They appeared at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, at the Musiksommer Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, at the International Piano Duo Festival Bad Herrenalb, several times at the Klavierfest Ammersee as well as the "Tons Voisins" Festival in Albi. Concert tours furthermore took them to France (Paris, Marseille), Austria (Vienna), Denmark (Odense), Spain (Tenerife), Poland (Pila), to the Czech Republic (Prague and Terezin), the Netherlands (Amsterdam) and on a regular basis to the USA (several times to both Los Angeles and Philadelphia, but also to Cleveland, San Diego and Washington). In 2018 Volker Ahmels was awarded the Federal Cross of Merit by Germany's President, for his contribution to the cause of ostracized music as Managing Director of the "Zentrum Verfemte Musik" at the Rostock Academy of Music and Theatre as well as Festival Director of the International Competition and Festival for Ostracized Music Schwerin.

Recording date: 2025-08-09/10.

Location: Klangmanufaktur Hamburg

Instrument: Steinway and Sons D grand piano from 1925 completely refurbished by Klangmanufaktur Hamburg, belonging to the Hamburg Symphony Orchestra known as "the blue grand piano"

Recording manager: Johannes Richter

Recording Studio: Die Tonspur Schwerin

PARTNERS: (THANKS TO)

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Steinway-Flügel aus der
KLANGMANUFAKTUR