

Alban Berg, Wozzeck (composed: 1917–1922; premiered: 1925)

The opera was based on a play by Georg Büchner, a story about a soldier who is driven to murder and madness by a hostile society: persecuted by his captain, experimented by a doctor, and betrayed by a woman.

Berg used a series of traditional instrumental forms to structure his opera:

Act I: Five Character Pieces (Exposition)

Scene 1: Wozzeck and the Captain—Suite

Scene 2: Wozzeck and Andres—Rhapsody on Three Chords

Scene 3: Wozzeck and Marie—March (Drum Major) and Lullaby (Marie's Child)

Scene 4: Wozzeck and the Doctor—Passacaglia

Scene 5: Marie and the Drum Major—Quasi Rondo

Act II: Symphony in Five Movements (Peripeteia or Development)

Scene 1: Marie alone—Sonata-form Movement

Scene 2: Captain, Doctor, Wozzeck—Invention and Fugue on Three Themes

Scene 3: Marie and Wozzeck—Largo in the Instrumentation of Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony, op. 9

Scene 4: Wozzeck and Others in the Tavern—Scherzo

Scene 5: Wozzeck and Drum Major in the Barracks—Rondo Marziale

Act III: Six Inventions (Catastrophe or Denouement)

Scene 1: Marie and Child—Inventions on a Theme

Scene 2: Wozzeck and Marie by the Pond—Invention on One Note

Scene 3: Wozzeck and Others in the Tavern—Inventions on a Rhythm

Scene 4: Wozzeck, Later the Doctor and Captain—Invention on a Six-Note Chord

Scene 5: Child, Other Children—Invention on an Eighth-Note Rhythm (Perpetuum Mobile)

Wozzeck nevertheless became a critical and commercial success almost overnight, opening to great acclaim in 17 cities in Germany between 1926 and 1933.

Act III – Synopsis

Scene 1: Overcome by guilt of adultery, Marie is reading the story of the woman taken in adultery from the Bible.

Scene 2: Marie and Wozzeck are walking through the wood. Wozzeck draws a knife and plunges it into Marie's throat.

Scene 3: In a tavern, the singer Margret notices the blood on Wozzeck's hand, and he flees.

Scene 4: Wozzeck recovers the murder weapon and throws it into the pool. He tries to wash the blood from his hands but drowns himself.

Scene 5: A child enters with news of the discovery of Marie's body, and the children, Marie's child with them, run off to look.

Scene 1 – Inventions on a theme



Scene 2 – Invention on a note



Scene 3 – Invention on a rhythm



Scene 4 – Invention on a hexachord



Scene 5 – Invention on a regular quaver movement

