

The Lulu Rondo: A Study of Contextual Representation

In the spring of 1934 Alban Berg was working determinedly on his new opera *Lulu* despite becoming increasingly nervous about his apparent inability to secure a venue for its premiere in the upcoming concert season. With his typical cynicism, a letter from Berg to Hans Heinsheimer at his publisher Universal Edition (UE) on May 23, 1934 indicated that the composer was assembling a "propaganda-suite" of music from *Lulu* in the event that an imminent premiere would not materialize. Berg worked on the project thereafter with uncharacteristic speed, writing to UE less than three weeks later that they would be receiving two movements of the new project sometime the following week. The five movements were completed in July and had their premiere on November 30, 1934, in Berlin.

The first movement of the *Lulu-Suite* is the Rondo, which is musically associated with the relationship between Lulu and Alwa, the son of her benefactor and third husband Doctor Schön. In its operatic setting, the Rondo is subjected to constant dramatic and musical interruptions as Lulu's numerous other suitors continually vie for her attention. These intrusions obscure both the development of Lulu and Alwa's relationship and the structure of the Rondo's underlying form. In the context provided by the *Lulu-Suite*, however, the fragmented sections of the Rondo are brought together and presented as a unified musical entity. The first part of this paper will address this and other contrasts between the operatic setting of the Rondo and its role in the *Lulu-Suite* and investigate their musical and dramatic implications. The second part of this study will re-assess the composer's motivations for creating the *Lulu-Suite*: despite Berg's apparent need for "propaganda", his strong connection to the work of literary critic Karl Kraus suggests a compelling alternative reason for the Suite's assembly that sets the five-movement work apart from other operatic concert pieces.

The Rondo's placement within the opera makes it emblematic of the romantic and sexual aspects of the relationship between Lulu and Alwa. Before the Rondo is introduced, the interactions between these two characters are characterized by Alwa's struggles with his amorous feelings for Lulu despite their familial association as adoptive siblings. His romantic yearnings, however, are idealistic and one-sided: Lulu is, and has been for some time, the willing subject of his idolatry while recognizing how easily he could be manipulated. The Rondo begins in measure 243 in Act Two, marking the pivotal scene where Alwa, unable to bear the tension within, admits to his desire for Lulu even though she is now his father's wife. Here, Lulu has invited Alwa to meet her at the family house before going out for a *matinée*; instead, upon his arrival, she greets him in a low-cut dress and begins to seduce him. What proceeds is a scene with a remarkable array of musical and dramatic distractions as the seduction takes place in the covert presence of all her other lovers, hidden among the screens, doors, and tablecloths in the same room.

The dialogue moves between Lulu's flirtatious comments to Alwa, leading him on, and his cautiously guarded and respectful replies that belie his fundamental attraction to her. The tension that would have resulted from his disciplined restraint and her overcoming of it is broken by a stream of ill-timed distractions: the entrance of the Manservant as he brings and removes their *hors d'oeuvres*, Doctor Schön's incredulous asides as he observes his manservant's behavior and son's betrayal, and the Athlete peeking out from behind the curtains. Alwa, for his part, expresses his exasperation with the Manservant's intrusions, but after he capitulates to the momentum of Lulu's seduction he becomes perfectly unaware of the near-comical events happening on stage all around him. In proclaiming his love, he lies blissfully overcome with his head in Lulu's lap as she absently strokes his hair before abruptly declaring, "I poisoned your mother." The Rondo then breaks off as Doctor Schön makes his presence known and Lulu's paramours attempt to flee from their hiding places. Chaos ensues onstage, and the action culminates in murder as Lulu fires five gunshots into her husband's back. The disastrous scene ends with the arrival of the police and Lulu's arrest.

The development and recapitulation of the Rondo takes place two years after that chaotic evening, as the couple recommences their relationship exactly where they left it prior to Lulu's incarceration. In contrast to the Rondo's fragmented exposition, the only operatic interruption in the remainder of the Rondo is a spoken paragraph over a B-flat open fifth in measure 1021 detailing Lulu's elaborate escape from prison. The difference in pacing makes the continually escalating music all the more passionate as it accompanies the consummation of their relationship. Here, Lulu's seduction of Alwa is unmediated by the fact that their tryst takes place in the very room – in fact upon the very sofa – where Doctor Schön bled to death. Her affected nonchalance in observing the coincidence and Alwa's passive unwillingness to face her pronouncement indicate his final capitulation to her wiles.

The relationship's period of romance ends with Act II, and from thereon a brutal reality sets into the opera's narrative. As fugitives from the law Lulu and Alwa flee to London, where, desolate and completely broke, all the glamour in their relationship has faded, much like Lulu herself. Alwa, completely infirm, complains about the venereal disease that he caught from Lulu while she, having no outward symptoms of her condition, begins her short-lived career as a streetwalker. When a client argues with Lulu about money, Alwa intercedes on her behalf and is killed with one brutal blow to the head. Far from showing any signs of shock or distress, Lulu simply stamps her foot in exasperation as her would-be client leaves the room without sex, and without paying her. Her selfish detachment makes Alwa's inability to look beyond his love or lust both tragic and infuriating.

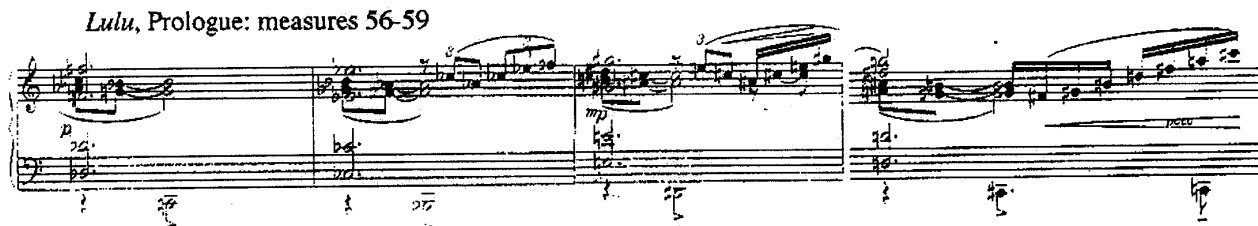
The first movement of the *Lulu-Suite*, however, allows Lulu and Alwa's relationship to exist in a completely different context, giving it a life of its own away from its sordid operatic surroundings. There are several factors that articulate the differences between the Rondo's operatic setting and its role in the *Suite*. The first is the opening of the *Suite* itself, where the Rondo is preceded by an 8-measure segment that Berg termed "Introduzione." Derived from measures 54–62 of the opera's Prologue, a motif commonly referred to as Lulu's Entrance Music (Figure 1), it opens the work with a warm and inviting atmosphere, with muted strings and a soaring flute solo.¹ This gesture is a significant departure from both the terse, dramatic tetrachord that starts the opera as well as the way the Rondo begins in its operatic context, which serves as an early indication that the composer's expressive intentions in the *Suite* are different.

The Entrance Music has been adapted for the Introduzione in two significant ways. First, the meter has been changed from 3/4 with $\text{♩} = 40$ in the opera's Prologue to a broader 6/4 meter for three measures before returning to 3/4 for the remaining five bars. The eight introductory measures are marked "Andante", which is later assigned a metronome marking of $\text{♩} = 69$. The broader meter and slightly more expansive tempo suggest the establishment of a more intimate atmosphere. Another change in the Introduzione is that it lies transposed a whole step above its original setting in the opera. This enables the Introduzione to segue into the Rondo in measure 8 with a descending chromatic half-step that anticipates the bass motion of the first three measures of the Rondo itself, allowing a seamless transition.

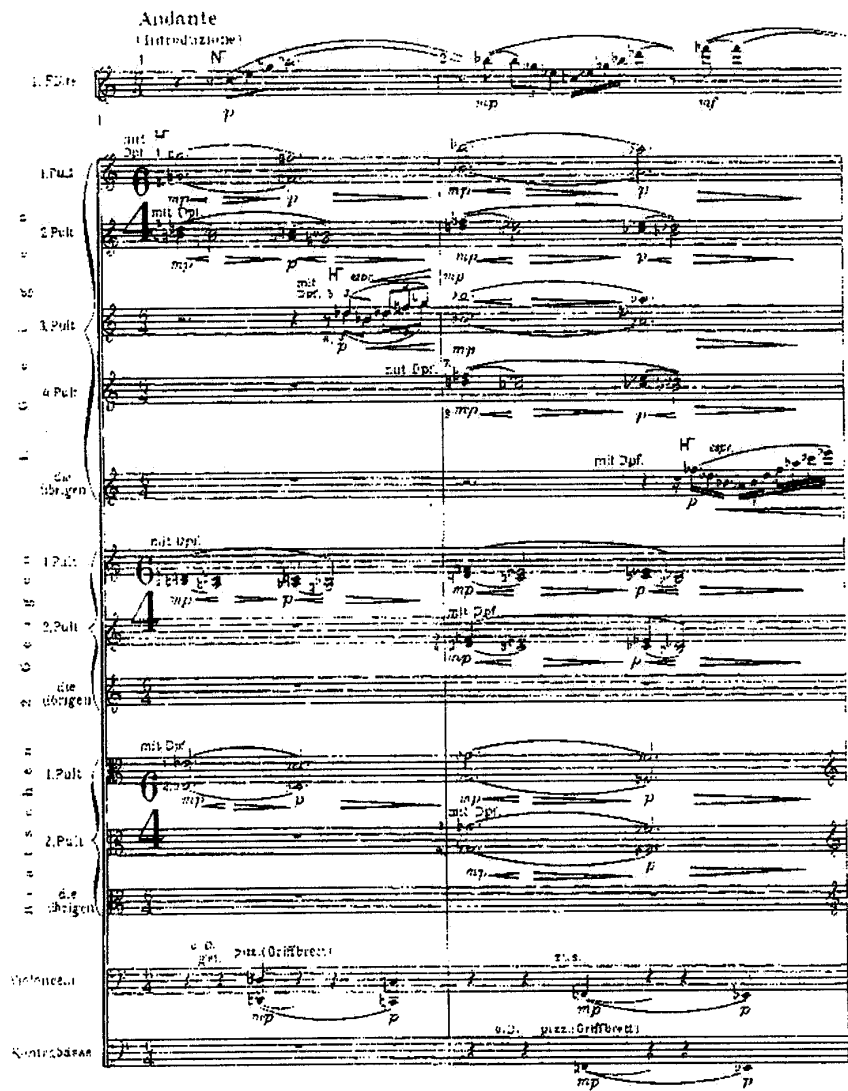
The second factor that differentiates the Rondo's setting in the *Suite* from its operatic context is the omission of all text in the *Suite's* rendering of the Rondo. Berg had previously contemplated having two vocal soloists for the *Suite*, a tenor and a soprano, but changed his mind several times as he pondered the difficulty of attaining suitable singers for performances. Although Berg also considered writing "optional" vocal parts, he eventually settled on retaining a soloist only for the third movement, the *Lied der Lulu*, and scoring the remaining movements for orchestra alone.

The absence of text creates a significant divergence in the portrayal of Lulu and Alwa's relationship since some of the most disturbing moments in the opera originate in the dialogue. For example, the exposition and recapitulation of the Rondo end with Alwa's submission to Lulu's charms. Both times, as he lies recovering from the emotion of the moment, she reminds him in the cold tone of *Sprechstimme* that she is a murderess: first, that she poisoned his mother, and later, as mentioned above, that his father bled to death on the sofa they were lying on. Another set of examples can be found in the excerpt that serves as the basis for the Introduzione. In the opera, the accompanying text is the Animal Trainer's scathing diatribe as he introduces Lulu to the audience as the serpent in his menagerie, chastising her for "meowing and preening" in order to misrepresent the "innate nature of Woman". Much later, when this music is heard again after

Figure 1.



Lulu-Suite, Movement 1 (Rondo): measures 1-2



(continued)

Lulu's return from prison, Alwa gazes into her face and proclaims that "were it not for your two childlike eyes, I would say that you were the most conniving whore who ever coaxed a man to his doom," to which Lulu replies, "By God, I wish I were!" The omission of these lines, which complicate and tarnish the audience's perception of Lulu's character as well as her relationship with Alwa, allows the music of the Introduzione to be convincingly integrated with the Rondo and for the movement to exist without being encumbered by the textual contradictions that permeate the opera.

(Figure 1, continued)

Lulu, Prologue: measures 60-62



Lulu-Suite, Movement 1 (Rondo): measures 3-7

The third point that differentiates the Rondo's operatic context from its setting in the *Lulu-Suite* is the presentation of the Rondo itself. In the opera, the musical and dramatic interruptions of the Rondo contribute to what Patricia Hall has called an "unrequited character."² Contributing to the Rondo's disjuncture, its development and recapitulation take place only after a considerable length of the opera: nearly 700 measures of music and a narrative gap of two years. In contrast, the first movement of the Suite unites the disparate strands of the Rondo material, thereby detaching

the Suite from the opera's narrative line. (A table of the Rondo's corresponding measure numbers between the opera and the Suite can be found in Figure 2 of your handout.) The unified exposition excludes all the music that signified the presence of Lulu's other lovers, resulting in a more intimate setting that is focused and believably personal. The uninterrupted music also achieves a more compelling musical pace that is allowed to build and surge in ways that suggest the contours of courtship.

Figure 2. Comparison table of measure numbers

<i>Lulu-Suite:</i> Rondo	<i>Lulu</i> (interruptions in parentheses)
1-8	Prologue: 56-62
9-15	Act II: 243-249
	250-261 (First interruption of Manservant)
16-27	262-273
	274 (Doctor Schön, aside)
28-39	275-286
	287-293 (Second interruption of Manservant)
	294 (Doctor Schön, aside)
	295-297 (Manservant and Doctor Schön withdraw)
40-51	298-309
	310-317 (The Athlete looks out from behind a curtain; Lulu glares at him. Doctor Schön, aside)
52-70	318-336 (Doctor Schön makes his presence known; end Rondo Exposition.)
71-220	1101-1150

Just as the interruptions are removed from the exposition, the substantial length of music that stands between the Rondo's exposition and its development and recapitulation in the opera is removed for its setting in the *Suite*. The excluded material, which contains Doctor Schön's murder as well as the "Film Music" detailing Lulu's arrest, subsequent incarceration, and escape from prison, signify the turn of Lulu's fortunes. By the time Lulu is reunited with Alwa in the opera, she is a convicted murderess as well as a fugitive from the law. By removing this from the narrative, Berg again focuses on the development of the couple's relationship. The Rondo recapitulation escalates the emotions introduced in the exposition with an increased urgency of phrasing and a higher level of orchestral dynamic, reaching *fortissimo* at its climax whereas the exposition attained only *forte*. If the exposition suggests the shape of courtship, then the music of the recapitulation is undeniably sexual in nature, representing a single encounter that progresses from a suggestive overture to consummation.

mentioned above, the accompanying text that identified Lulu's Entrance Music as with the character of Lulu has been deleted from the *Introduzione*, which allows for the argument that the "entrance" portrayed here is not that of the Lulu character but rather that of a Woman, entering the Rondo's representation of a Man's idealized world. Berg's usage of the Entrance Music in the *Introduzione* is appropriate not only for dramatic purposes, but also because the Rondo itself is already embedded with identifiable motifs derived from the Entrance Music in measures 71–74, 80–86, 100–107, and 150–156. However, both strands of the musical material remain distinct, which allows an interpretation of a metaphorical co-existence.

When comparing the Rondo's presentation in the opera to that of the *Suite*, the most notable differences have come down to a matter of dramatic intention and portrayal along the established ideal of Karl Kraus. However, the romanticized ideal portrayed in the *Suite* has a significant common thread with the broken, debased reality of the relationship portrayed in the opera: following the apex of the relationship's passionate consummation, the music falls tumultuously into the bass and the movement or scene ends with a furious iteration of the "fate" chords. In the opera, the chords make explicit what the audience already senses: namely, that Alwa's sexual and emotional obsession with Lulu will end in tragedy. Conversely, Berg's retention of the "fate" chords at the close of both the first and last movements of the *Suite* is harder to explain, and an adequate treatment of this and other issues lies outside the scope of this paper. It is apparent, however, that the movement's trajectory points firmly downward, from the initial ideal depicted in the Rondo to the fulfillment of what is suggested in its closing measures.

The direction that Berg explores over the next four movements of the *Lulu-Suite* continues to incorporate Karl Kraus's concept of idealization and the use of characters as examples of archetypal representation. The Rondo's suggestive duality enabled Berg to explore the coexisting levels of the Lulu narrative in an operatic forum as well as in a separate concert-work: an idealized relationship between a man and a woman and its shackling to an ultimately disillusioning, sordid reality. The greatest strengths of the Rondo, however, are its creative potential that allows for a very effective presentation in both operatic and instrumental settings, and its immediacy as a representation of personal drama, idealized or otherwise.

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Notes

- ¹ The Entrance Music is also called the "Freiheit motif" by David Headlam, after observing its association with Lulu's dramatic pronouncement upon her escape from prison in Act Two. (Headlam, p. 108)
² Hall, p. 145.
³ Hall, p. 144, Headlam pg. 99, and Jarman, p. 208, respectively.
⁴ From an unpublished paper presented by the present author at the AMS 2004 entitled "Alban Berg's Three Fragments from Wozzeck: A Character Reconsidered."
⁵ This was later published in its entirety in Kraus's weekly journal *Die Fackel*, Issue no. 182.
⁶ Grimstad, p. 78.
⁷ Schroeder, p. 102–3.
⁸ A more detailed discussion of the formal dichotomy between Berg's intention to express the Krausian ideal in drama and the composer's overt association of himself with Alwa's character will be discussed in my forthcoming dissertation on Berg's *Three Fragments from Wozzeck* and the *Lulu-Suite*.
⁹ This is a large topic with several interpretations. Two discussions which relate well to the present topic can be found on p. 53–98 in Silvio Dos Santos's dissertation *Portraying Lulu: Desire and Identity in Alban Berg's "Lulu"* and p. 306–327 in Suzanne Rode's *Alban Berg und Karl Kraus*.

Santrauka

Bergo kūrybinis procesas tarp „Lulu“ ir „Lulu siuitos“: naujas požiūris į rondo

Mįslinga laisvo elgesio Lulu, pagrindinė A. Bergo to paties pavadinimo operos veikėja, išgyveno tris santuokas ir begalę meilės nuotykių, iš kurių ir muzikine, ir dramaturgine prasme toliausiai pažengė jos flirtas su Alva, Lulu geradarijo ir trečiojo sutuoktinio daktaro Šiono sūnumi. Nors nuo pat pirmos iki paskutinės operos scenos šis jų ryšys yra romantiškas ir atvirai seksualus, scenoje jis kažkodėl vaizduojamas fragmentiškai. Poros santykius muzikoje atskleidžia rondo, į kurį operos eigoje nuolat įsiterpia veiksmo ir muzikiniai epizodai. Dėl šių intarpų veikėjų santykių raida tampa miglota. Nors jų ryšys akivaizdžiai progresuoja, jį vaizduojant lyg ir trūksta nuoseklumo bei vientisumo.

1935 m. pavasarį Bergas sudarė penkių dalių „Lulu siuitą“. Ir tiktai čia, kai rondo tampa pirmąją kūrinio dalimi, jis nuskamba nuo pradžios iki galo, nepertraukiamas ir netrikdomas operos intarpų. Operoje Lulu santykiai su Alva tėra tik vienas iš jos meilės nuotykių, o siuitoje jų meilės istoriją perteikia sukoncentruota rondo medžiaga, kuri įtikinamai plėtojama.

Pranešime analizuojama, kokią prasmę rondo įgauna „Lulu siuitoje“ ir vaizduojant Lulu bei Alvos santykius. Išvadose daroma prielaida, kad Bergas galėjo turėti daug svaresnių priežasčių „Lulu siuitai“ sukurti, negu iki šiol galima buvo manyti.