

Thoughts on Vollmond (Full Moon)

For SATB div. and Handpan in D minor

Approx. 5:50 minutes



Vollmond is a piece based on the poem of the same name by Else Lasker-Schüler (1869-1945), first published in her collection *Meine Wunder* ("My Miracles") in 1911.

The composition takes an unusual approach through its instrumentation of choir and Handpan. The Handpan is a relatively young percussion instrument consisting of two connected steel shells, with the top shell featuring tone fields that are played by hand to produce sound. The combination of this young instrument with the traditionally rich sound of a mixed choir is a novel one, offering much potential due to the limited number of compositions written for this setup.

In this piece, the Handpan's overtone-rich, percussive sound, characterized by long reverberation, is combined with the vocal colors of the choir. The choir is used in a partly spoken-percussive manner, blending whispered, spoken, or shouted elements with sung ones. Both musical parties alternate between foreground and background positions throughout the piece.

The composition is divided into five sections, each corresponding to a part of Else Lasker-Schüler's expressionist poem.

In the first section ("Leise schwimmt der Mond durch mein Blut..." / "Gently the moon swims through my blood..."), the main tonal material is introduced, consisting of the notes A, Bb, E, F within a D minor context. After an extended Handpan solo introduction, the choir transports the listeners into the mystical, restless night of the lyrical self.

In the second section ("Schlummernde Töne sind die Augen des Tages" / "The eyes of the day are slumbering tones"), the two musical parties exchange the material from the first section and further develop it. Soft, seemingly uncoordinated speech represents the inner voices of the lyrical self. For the first time, tones outside of the scale appear, leading into the third section.

The third section ("Wandelhin – taumelher / Ich kann deine Lippen nicht finden..." / "Wandering there – reeling here / I cannot find your lips...") features a drastic shift in the musical material. The unsuccessful search for the other person results in a sense of aimlessness, expressed through the use of many augmented sounds and large glissandi.

The fourth section ("Wo bist du, ferne Stadt / Mit den segnenden Düften?" / "Where are you, distant city / With the blessing scents?") describes a longing for the unknown. The restless lyrical self expresses this through desperate loud calls for its place of rest, while repeatedly withdrawing into itself with whispered utterances. Musically, the Handpan partially takes the lead, while the choir divides into eight parts, sings little, and contributes a noise-like texture to accompany the Handpan.

The final section ("Immer senken sich meine Lider / Über die Welt – alles schläft." / "My eyelids always lower / Over the world – everything sleeps.") represents a calming both in text and music after the previously turbulent parts. Here, the soprano is set in opposition to the other three voices, and the musical material from the previous sections is revisited and summarized. Fragments of words, individual sounds, and an improvisational, minimalistic Handpan line are heard, while the soprano, as the only singing voice, gradually thins out until only a single singer remains, bringing the piece to a quiet close.

The Handpan tuning in D minor used here is a common form of the instrument, consisting of ten tone fields with the following tuning: D3, A3, Bb3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, C5. Special thanks to David Kuckhermann (<https://worldpercussion.net/>) and Milena Holtz, who lent me one of their instruments for this piece and provided numerous insights into the specifics of the Handpan, helping me showcase it to its best effect.

If a Handpan is not available for performance, a Vibraphone can be used as an alternative.

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Yannick Wittmann

Vollmond

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mein Blut ...
Schlummernde Töne sind die Augen
des Tages
Wandelhin – taumelher

Ich kann deine Lippen nicht finden ...
Wo bist du, ferne Stadt
Mit den segnenden Düften?

Immer senken sich meine Lider
Über die Welt – alles schläft.

(Else Lasker-Schüler)

Full Moon

Gently the moon swims through my
blood...
The eyes of the day are slumbering
tones
Wandering there – reeling here

I cannot find your lips...
Where are you, distant city
With the blessing scents?

My eyelids always lower
Over the world – everything sleeps.

(Else Lasker-Schüler)