

# Rediscovering Pavel Haas (1899-1944) and his Four Songs on Chinese Poetry (1944)

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### Biography

Pavel Haas was born in Brno (Brünn), in the region of Moravia on June 21, 1899. In his teens, he enrolled at the Music School of the Philharmonic Society, thus beginning his serious musical training. After being in the army during the war, he began studying with Leoš Janáček, which immensely influenced Haas. He began to compose music for the stage, and later film music with the help of his brother Hugo, an actor. By 1941, he realized the imminent danger and divorced his non-Jewish wife to protect her and his young daughter. Soon after, he was sent to the camp at Terezin (Theresienstadt). After getting to the camp, he became depressed and sick, so fellow composer Gideon Klein took it upon himself to get Haas composing again, literally putting the pen and paper in his hands. He worked on many pieces up until months before his death. In October 1944, after the filming of a propaganda film about Terezin that he was featured in, he and 18,000 others were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they upon arrival were lined up for inspection. Karel Ančerl, friend and conductor, was in line next to him about to be chosen to die when Haas started coughing, sending Haas to his death, but saving Ančerl's life.



Lubomír Peduzzi. "Haas, Pavel." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed February 12, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/12109>.

Peduzzi, Lubomir. *Pavel Haas: Leben Und Werk Des Komponisten*. Hamburg: Von Bockel, 1996.

Karas, Joža. *Music in Terezin: 1941-1945*. New York: Beaufort, 1985.

Haas, Pavel. "Four Songs on Chinese Poetry." Berlin, Germany: Bote & Bock, 1992. 20-26.

### Musical Influences

When Haas first started composing, a German Romantic influence was very prevalent, but with the help of some Czech composers he moved away from romanticism. When Janáček became his teacher, he was introduced to Les Six. During the terror of the Nazi time immediately preceding WWII, he, like many Czech composers before him, became influenced by the carol "St. Wenceslas". This carol became a source of solace for Czechs in times of war and terrible change. While in the camps, this song still musically influenced his compositions.



**Mm.13-14, the bamboo sways along with the chromatic sway of the notes up and down.**



**Mm. 21-25, The ducks flying in the sky could be an image of war plans. The 3-lets in the accompaniment look like wings.**



### Four Songs

This song cycle has many interesting features. These songs are based on four poems from four different Chinese poets. The songs were initially translated into Czech. In the edition seen here, it is also translated into German and English. The whole work is highly chromatic, but not atonal. The piece still exhibits tonal qualities as shown in the examples. The text-music relationship is expressive, each text having its own character. The pieces are described as follows: grave, animated, grave, and grave once more, but concluding with a joyful coda, invoking a new day (Peduzzi 1992, 4). The excerpts are from the song titled *Sleepless Night*, the fourth in the cycle. The song being at the end is very important, because it is likely a metaphor to the war being the sleepless night, but the new day dawns allowing for joy (hope) and singing (his music), thus playing with the idea that the war will end and they will be free again.



**Mm. 35-40, the chords look and sound like they could be Haas's bad dreams, tonal but very chromatic. This is followed by text about dreams.**



**Mm. 57-59, Increased harmonic rhythm as well as tempo move the sound through from a minor sounding first half to a joyful closing section in CM.**

**Mm. 1-2, show the initial CM chord and subsequent chromaticism.**

**Mm. 97-100, concludes the song cycle with a distinct CM chord as well as a La section.**

