*The Alma Fetish* is a full-length opera that I composed between 2006-2012 to a libretto by Gavin Kostick. It tells of the relationship between Mahler's widow Alma, the painter Oskar Kokoschka, his maid Hulda, and a life-sized doll that takes Alma's place when she abandons Oskar. The opera received a concert performance by Wide Open Opera in Dublin's National Concert Hall in September 2013.

In 2015 I composed *The Alma Fragments*, a set of four orchestral pieces based on the opera, commissioned by RTÉ. The title was suggested by the "fragments" which Alban Berg extracted from his opera *Wozzeck*. Ironically, these pieces are more unified than *The Alma Fetish* itself, which is fragmented or kaleidoscopic in character. I have retained the comparatively small orchestra used in the opera, adding soprano saxophone (doing duty for a number of female voices) and organ (emulating certain entries of the chorus). The *Fragments* follow roughly the overall narrative shape of the opera, and may be summarised as follows:

I: *Encounter – Seduction*. Extracted from Act 1, scene 1. Oskar encounters Alma at a party in her Viennese apartment. Alma seduces him by singing the *Liebestod* from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (which, together with that opera's *Prelude*, provides much of the opera's pitch material).

II: *After War – The Doll Arrives*. Extracted from Act 1, scenes 2 & 3. Oskar has been almost killed in the first World War, and Alma has left him for Walter Gropius. In his Dresden studio he recovers from his wounds, physical and emotional, and orders a life-sized doll to be made in Alma's image. The doll is delivered – but it is a hideous thing, the sight of which plunges him into despair.

III: *Shadows of Evening*. Extracted from Act 2, scene 1. With the affectionate assistance of his maid, Hulda, Oskar learns to live without Alma, and to revive his art by painting the doll (which shows some signs of coming to life).

IV: *Polka – Twenty Years Later*. Extracted from Act 2, scenes 2 & 3. Oskar throws a wild party at which the “guest of honour” is the doll, which is drenched with wine and decapitated. Twenty years later he encounters Alma in a restaurant in Venice; although he has not entirely shed his bitterness, their final parting achieves a kind of reconciliation.

Certain important elements of the narrative are absent from this condensation – most notably the embattled course of the couple's relationship, Oskar's near-death experience in World War 1, the consummation of his relationship with Hulda, and the E.T.A. Hoffmann-like animation of the Doll. It follows that *The Alma Fragments* could have taken a quite different shape – but perhaps this is true of all compositions.

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