

## PAUL HINDEMITH

BY ALFRED EINSTEIN

TO appreciate Paul Hindemith's place in the younger generation one must understand the peculiar quality of the new music in Germany, its birth and development. Nowhere else was this movement initiated under greater difficulties, in no other country has it survived more ferocious opposition, an opposition not only logical and aesthetic, but also semi-nationalistic in spirit.

Yet the cause of the struggle is internal, not external. Germany's spiritual exclusion, during the war and after, was little more than a passing incident in the development of the new music; its effect would have been no greater had the exclusion been even more complete; though in a certain immediate sense, to be discussed later, the war had its influence on music here, even on Paul Hindemith.

The true explanation is more penetrating. The Germans are still the romanticists in art, especially in music, and romanticism is their peculiar form of expression. After Wagner this became hyper-romanticism, as witness Strauss, Reger and Mahler. With each of these, romanticism took a sudden new form, characteristic of the man's time and personality; in Mahler it was achieved only under the fiercest creative stress for in his *Ninth Symphony* he has reached the border-line of the new music.

Most symptomatic is the swift revolution which took place in Arnold Schoenberg, who leaped from one pole to the other. In his *Gurrelieder* he reached a climax of romantic sonority, almost a romantic materialism. By a radical change he shifted to a form of "expression," which denies all the elements of music—rhythm, melody and especially harmony, the medium essential to romantic effect. No other nation, not even Russia, experienced such a complete break with tradition. In France, and later in countries susceptible to a Latin art-ideal, such as England, Italy and Spain, the

discarding of romanticism was more gradual. Through impressionism Debussy protested against Wagnerism, and the exaggeration of sentiment, the pathos of neo-romantic music is minimized without being entirely abolished; in Debussy's most pictorial pieces a mild humanity is still perceptible. Impressionism in France was a transition to the new "expression," a transition which practically failed to appear at all in Germany.

It is obvious that this abrupt change in Germany was quite conscious. Most of the new musicians had the program before writing their music; hence their results are theoretical and abstract, programmatic and forced. A few have slowly learned to tread the conquered ground with greater security and surer instinct. Originally they were merely "cultured" musicians, recognizing the needs of their time intellectually rather than emotionally—not unlike these members of the Florentine Camerata in the sixteenth century who concocted the *Nuove Musiche* of their day out of theoretical speculations about the music of antiquity.

Hindemith has nothing in common with these. He does not belong to the number of young German musicians who take a doctor's degree at the University after their conservatory courses and continue to explore academic problems. There is nothing at all academic about him. He is simply a musician who produces music as a tree bears fruit, without further philosophic purpose.

Born in Hanau in 1895, he first took up the violin and later studied with Arnold Mendelssohn, a true German master of the old school, then with Bernhard Sekles, one of the finest and most modern among the older German musicians. Hindemith was apparently not much influenced by either of them. He became a violinist and then the concert-master of the Frankfort Opera House orchestra—unlike the average young, so-called cultured, German musician who seeks nothing less than a concert-conductorship. He did his work there and at the same time composed what he felt impelled to write. Since 1923 he has played the viola in the Amar-quartet, which is the moving spirit of the chamber-music festivals in Donaueschingen, and with which he travels. He belongs to the jury of the Donaueschingen Veranstaltungen, and for a year was a member of the jury of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein, within whose conflicts of interests he doubtless felt himself

out of place. He resents all pretense; he is unwilling to exploit his feelings publicly, and he keeps his two feet squarely on the ground. He merely writes music, the best that he can produce. It is evident that he does not lack critical ability for he has published only part of his work, guarding the rest in a locked drawer. His health and his freshness are a thorn in the side of those who prefer to see in the whole new musical movement only the flavorless production of decadent fools.



Hindemith started out by writing chamber-music and one might almost say that he has remained an instrumental composer, although he made early ventures into the lyrical and dramatic field. He is an unusual representative of the new school; his music is not a descriptive, poetical self-portrait, nor is it, to use the present well-beloved terms, "objective," or "pure." A most personal individual quality informs his peculiarly built, independent rhythms and melodies. This individuality is consistent in Hindemith from beginning to end of his more than forty works.

His development may be divided into about three periods. The most important work of the first is probably the *String Quartet*, Opus 16; that of the second the *Kammermusik*, Opus 25, Number 1. The third begins with the *Marienleben* and probably ends with his new and still unknown opera *Cardillac*.

The three pieces for cello and piano, his first published work, have true musical content, but are written in a chaotic style. The string quartet in F minor, which followed these, is of an abounding, joyful nature, but still very indefinite in style, passing from the gravity typical of classical chamber-music, to the introduction of a tango in the finale. The lack of form is less felt in the five published sonatas, Opus 11. Of these the two for violin still show the struggle between a fettered and a free expression. Reminders of Brahms, and even traces of impressionism (reactions to Debussy or Busoni) are curiously mingled with a bold and independent counterpoint; the voices themselves are always plastically formed, engaged in lively, turbulent dialogue.

In the cello sonata this plasticity of themes is everything, the harmonic device nothing. It is Hindemith's first atonal work and the first in which classical elements of style, the toccata and sonata scheme, are subject to a new form of expression. Somewhat contradictory is the following sonata for viola and piano in which he succeeds in cleverly coupling the variation and finale forms. Here he seeks not a formal speech but a primitive mode of expression. This primitiveness is transmuted in later works into a true simplicity.

The first three dramatic pieces reveal a similar mixture of elements; the one-act opera, *Moerder, Hoffnung der Frauen*, written to a text by the painter, designer and poet, Oskar Kokoschka; the music for Franz Blei's Burmese puppet play, *Das Nusch-Nuschi*, and the one-act opera based on August Stramm's *Sancta Susanna*. Kokoschka's sombre drama of the relations between man and wife is interpreted in an atmospheric, deeply sonorous style. In the impudent, burlesque puppet-show, on the other hand, particularly in the gay dances, Hindemith discloses his extraordinary rhythmic talent; some risqué episodes may be excused for the general brilliance of the little work. The most important and mature of these three is *Sancta Susanna*. Though the subject—the erotic woes of a nun predestined to a tragic end—is extremely delicate and difficult to present, Hindemith has dealt with it in a sweeping, stirring and altogether novel fashion. All outward occurrences, the mysterious rustlings in the dark church, the "voices" of nature, are interpreted as experiences of the heroine's soul. This example of a new operatic art is bound to have historical influence.

In the most mature work of this period, the second string quartet, we find, particularly in the first movement, a rhythmic and melodic force and a remarkable clarity of form, whose vitality has satisfied even Hindemith's adversaries. For the first time, Hindemith, in the slow movement, by the use of chromatic lines creates a depth of feeling which disproves the charge of insensibility laid against the new music. It is his most convincing work.

Immediately after these two positive achievements, Hindemith entered his second period, characterized by negation, irony and furious scorn, which reached its climax in *Kammermusik*, Number 1, Opus 24. He was undoubtedly under Strawinsky's spell at

this time, although the Russian often seems to play his game coolly, intently, remaining *raffiné*, while Hindemith shakes his jester's cap in secret fury and sadness. The German is never more of a romanticist than when he scorns romanticism.

The finale of *Kammermusik* Number 1 bears the title "1921." A piano suite in which a slow, quiet *Nachtstueck* appears with a *March, Shimmy, Boston, and Ragtime* is entitled "1922." These were bleak horrible years in Germany, not only because of misfortunes from without but because of an inner despair, which could be drowned out only by shrieks, senseless motion and forced merriment. Hindemith describes this condition in two movements of the *Kammermusik*, whose mad orgy culminates with a vulgar foxtrot in the finale. This tendency toward a soulless callousness appears in the chief movement of the third string quartet, where it exhausts itself in a primitive rhythm, and also in the *Kleine Kammermusik* for five wind instruments, which develops into an empty jest. That this negativeness is but the reverse side of a spiritual affirmation is made evident in the song cycle, *Die Junge Magd*, for contralto, flute, clarinet and string quartet, written to verses of the young Austrian poet, George Trakl, who, unable to endure the horrors of a Galician war hospital, one night quietly took his own life. His sombre fate finds an echo in the unspeakable sadness of the music, the composer's former lack of expression has now become the deepest emphasis.

With *Marienleben*, a song cycle for soprano and piano we find Hindemith at the beginning of a new period. Parody and denial have disappeared. His style has been purified into a profound simplicity and concentration by a severely plastic polyphony. This concentration of itself leads him to the use of an older more "objective" form, the basso ostinato of the seventeenth century, which liberates the voice and at the same time sustains it; a return which in this work is not archaic but rather expresses a feeling that the pious, delicate subject should not be subjectively expressed, that a deeper symbolism might be conveyed through the construction rather than the motif.

What is organic in this work becomes pure archaism in several of those that follow,—an obsolete method, which, although elaborated in a new way, remains an adoption. It is not necessary to

discuss here the dance pantomime, *Der Daemon*, a distinctive work which however falls between the second and third periods, or the *Madrigals*, performed for the first time at Donaueschingen in 1925, although with them Hindemith entered a new field. It is in the fourth string quartet, the string trio, the solo violin sonatas of Opus 31, the canonic sonata for two flutes and also in the mechanical, totally lifeless study for the piano, Opus 37, that this archaism becomes definitely intentional. It often appears in movements of fervent and touching emotion, as in the *Intermezzo* of Opus 31; it turns to pre-Bach forms as in the small cantata on romantic texts, for soprano, oboe, viola and cello, entitled *Die Serenaden*. The construction in the latter is reminiscent of the old thirteenth century motet, with the accompanying parts subject to laws other than those for the voice.

Hindemith's most recent works are for orchestra—*Kammermusik* Opus 36, and the *Concertos* for piano, for cello, for violin and for orchestra in Opus 38. They are not modern but in the classic manner with obligato solos. Here again the element of pure style is lacking. Hindemith continues to seek a classic ideal in the toccata, fugue, chaconne and basso ostinato forms, his thematic development and instrumental grouping are modeled on the oldest examples. But in each work his own spirit appears, savage and passionate, with renewed and almost terrifying vigor, as in the *Potpourri* from the piano concerto, a little piece that is unsurpassed in its mechanical medley of sound, and also in the shrill *Tarantella* on the basso ostinato in Opus 38.

Once more there is an impending crisis in this distraction, this division of forces between an achieved form and a revolutionary impulse. But the discord will again be resolved by so true and gifted a musician. Undoubtedly he will find his own salvation.

