

HINDEMITH* TODAY

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A FRIENDLY boyish head, its blonde hair tinged of late years with grey, surmounts a lithe, youthful figure. Small in stature, Paul Hindemith likes to make himself smaller still by sitting on a low hassock. He prefers to remain close to the earth. From this vantage point, he leads the conversation unobtrusively, a clever, learned, inexorably logical participant, a little malicious, but friendly even in his malice. His knowledge embraces not only the music of every age, but also the oldest and newest arts of poetry and painting. His talk is not abstract but concrete, his point of view realistic.

Hindemith plays the viola magnificently and has besides some command of all the instruments. Playing music is an integrating element of his nature and well-being. There are few musicians who have such an organic relation to their medium. An accomplished performer, a real craftsman of music, he is a credit to the old German tradition of developing creative power via the instrument.

His fundamental characteristic is a sustained and bantering cheerfulness. Hindemith loves to laugh, but his laughter does not glance off the surface of things. Apparently unconcerned, he often penetrates uncannily far into the heart of his subject. Like Mozart, he can express fundamental verities jestingly.

To learn and to teach are his passions. Even after he was a composer of world fame he took special lessons in branches of musical science that with his manifold activities he would not have been able to master alone. His pupils bear him an affection which is not the expression of a fanatic cult. He is never the distant "Meister" but the co-worker, an older, more experienced colleague of his pupils. There is really no other musician who has attracted such a large following of young men.

*Paul Hindemith will make his first visit to America in April of this year.

Hindemith, as is well known, is of humble origin. His parents, Silesian by descent, were poor workers in Hanau, a South German city near Frankfort-am-Main. He owes his position entirely to his own capacities which are expressed in a marvelous ease both of production and performance. He mastered the various stages of professional musicianship with unusual thoroughness, being in turn a dance musician, a violinist in the orchestra, (rapidly advancing to the post of Konzert-Meister at the Frankfort Opera), viola-player in the distinguished Amar-Quartet, conductor of his own and others' works, teacher of practice and theory, and finally, organizer of the musical life of Turkey. And all during this time he has pursued his chief occupation, never apart from his practical work but always developing out of it—the composition of music.

HIS PLACE

Hindemith's art has been world-famous since the surprising success of his chamber music at the festivals in Salzburg and Donaueschingen. Like other great German musicians of the past he is, in some respects, prized more in England, France or Italy than at home. But Hindemith is also the most important German representative of that *Ars Nova* which has developed during the last twenty-five years in opposition to the double tradition of romanticism and impressionism. His ascendancy could not be reconciled with the cultural trends of National Socialism. Though at its inception the Reich's Musikkammer pledged itself not to interfere with any movement, premieres of Hindemith's music were banned, leading, as will be recalled, to Wilhelm Furtwängler's resignation. Furtwängler maintained his position on Hindemith but in October 1936, after a few successful attempts to play this music in the face of opposition, the ban was clamped down more firmly. In Germany today Hindemith cannot even appear as a viola player. However he still remains professor of composition at the state Academy of Music, and his scores, still published by Schott in Mainz, enjoy a good sale, as do the records of his works conducted by himself. Hindemith's influence on the young generation of German composers continues to grow. Even older musicians, like the officially fostered Max Trapp, lean on him stylistically.

Strongly attached to his South German fatherland, Hindemith has suffered greatly in the struggle waged about him. But he has retained his poise of spirit and lives a calm life, aloof from politics, occupied with his work, a representative figure in his conduct and his character.

DER SCHWANENDREHER

Of Hindemith's most recent music, only the three symphonic pieces from *Mathis der Maler* have been heard in the United States. Though this opera has long since been completed, neither the text, which Hindemith himself wrote, nor the piano score have yet been made available to the public.

After *Mathis* in 1935 came the concerto for viola and chamber orchestra. Hindemith describes it as a concerto on old folksongs and names it *Der Schwanendreher* after the title of one of these songs. The work is in three parts; it lasts twenty-five minutes and is one of his longest concertos. This has been played several times in foreign countries and Hindemith will present it now in the United States. In *Mathis*, too, Hindemith took his themes from an old German song, *Es singen drei Engel ein süßen Gesang*, in the first part, and two Gregorian motives, *Lauda Sion Salvatorem* and *Hallelujah*, in the third. This exploitation of old song treasures is quite typical of him. It was already indicated in some variations passages in his early chamber music, for example in the *Solo-Violin Sonata*, Opus 31, No. II and in the "Spielmusik," *Ein Jäger aus Kurpfalz*, from Opus 45.

Der Schwanendreher, which uses four folksongs of the fifteenth and sixteenth century as thematic material, is one of the most personal of Hindemith's works. Is it program music? The legend that the composer set at the head of the score may furnish a hint: "A minstrel entering a merry company displays what he has brought back from foreign lands: songs serious and gay, and finally a dance piece. Like a true musician, he expands and embellishes the melodies, preluding and improvising according to his fancy and ability. This medieval picture is the inspiration of the composition." Nevertheless, the three parts are absolute music; only in the foundation of the work, as in the *Mathis* symphony and later in the *Three Piano Sonatas*, does the element of expression become more prominent.

In *Schwanendreher*, the solo instrument plays a greater part in outlining the form as a whole than in either of the earlier viola concertos, Opus 36 and 48. The orchestra is also larger, employing two flutes, an oboe, two B \flat -clarinets, two bassoons, three F-horns, a C-trumpet, trombone, harp, kettle-drums, four violoncelli and three double basses (the high strings, violins and violas, are omitted to safeguard the tonal isolation of the solo part). Compared to Hindemith's earlier style, the polyphony here is essentially simpler. There are long homophonic stretches on a relatively simple, if not more traditionally cadenced harmonic basis. After a rather slow, preluding introduction, the first movement offers a typical Hindemith 3/2 allegro, somewhat in the manner of his earlier "motorized" passages. It is powerful, positive music, carried forward with a logical feeling for form, relentless in the interweaving and rhythmic interpretation of a few plastic motives. The song *Zwischen Berg und tiefem Tal* is used as a theme. The second movement has two contrasting parts, an adagio on a melancholy song, *Nun laube, Lindlein, laube*, very feelingly introduced by a duo of solo viola and harp, and a brisk, saucy, cheerful, five-voice fugato, which works up a dance melody, *Der Gutzgauch auf dem Zaune sass*, with a chuckling, mocking counter-motive in gay imitation. The most musically important movement is the variations-finale. Five brilliant variations feature the viola and orchestra in virtuoso style. The theme is the *Schwanendreher* song, whose vigorous eighth-note beginning leads rondo-fashion through all five variations. The viola has many imposing tasks in this finale, but Hindemith writes so marvelously for the instrument that the effect compensates for all the difficulties.

SMALLER WORKS

Last summer, the modern music festival in Baden-Baden which presented a program of works by Stravinsky, Malipiero, and Conrad Beck, introduced Hindemith's new *Sonata-in-E* for violin and piano. He had published no such works since the two charming selections from Opus 2 (1920), although there is a marked dearth in modern music literature of piano-violin compositions in more important dimensions. This *Sonata* was unusually successful; it was repeated a few months later at Georg Kulenkampff's concert in Berlin. Nevertheless, I do not consider

this one of Hindemith's best works. The tendency to simplification is obvious; technically the piece is quite unpretentious in the violin as well as in the piano part. It has many intimate delicacies of craftsmanship, but in comparison with Hindemith's other violin music, especially the *Sonata-in-D* from Opus 11, it makes a relatively poor showing. A moderately cheerful spirit, romantic but not disturbing, pervades the playful arabesques of this quasi-E-major. The best part is the inspired slow introduction of the second movement, up to the Tarantella. In the Tarantella itself, there is a brilliantly written passage where 3/4 and 6/8 time are opposed, while the violins play the theme of the slow introduction. Here the development concept and hence sonata principle seem to have taken on a newer, more original, revelation.

The *Trauermusik* for viola, 'cello or violin and string orchestra has a romantic history. In 1936, Hindemith was giving concerts in London. King George V died on January 20th and the next day Hindemith was commissioned by the British Broadcasting Company to write a memorial work. Its radio premiere took place on the 22nd, with Hindemith playing the viola solo himself. There are four short movements which run into each other, and it lasts only nine minutes; yet despite its small dimensions it reveals such power of invention and musical expression, that it cannot be dismissed as unimportant "occasional" music. From the slow introductory funeral-march movement, there rises a wailing melody of the solo-instrument, whose ascending power from then on dominates the work. The two middle movements have the 12/8 rhythm of a sorrowful Siciliano, whose motives are intertwined in an increasingly complex polyphony. Then there is a calming down in the conclusion of the chorale, *Für deinen Thron tret ich hiermit*, interrupted by recitative interludes of the solo instruments. In its apportioning of contrasts, in the changing procession of musical images while the fundamental mood is maintained, this short work is a masterpiece.

THE PIANO SONATAS

Of Hindemith's latest productions, the three new *Piano Sonatas* (1936) tell us most about his development. They are a comprehensive exposition of all the art of structural form that Hindemith has developed in twenty-five years of work. At the

same time his inclination to simplify the tonal feeling is most marked here, but more about this "tonal tendency" of Hindemith later. For the present, a short outline of the forms will be attempted. The first, longest and most important of the three sonatas, has five movements. As in the *Schwanendreher*, Hindemith prefixes a motto; this time it is no imagistic vision but a lyrical one, Friedrich Hölderlin's poem *Der Main*. There is a parallel in many verses of this splendid example of German romantic lyricism, to Hindemith's own destiny. Is he not the "homeless singer," who even in paradise longs for the shores of Greece, for the banks of the Main? This is a new note in Hindemith's work, though perhaps not (since Ernst Krenek's *Reisebuch*) unknown to the world of new music. Hölderlin's poem, a hymn to his South German home, was, Hindemith writes, "the impulse to composition of this sonata." The first of the five movements, a short Andantino, reflects much of the quietly glowing, somewhat melancholy mood of the poem. It is, so to speak, the outline of a sonata movement, almost only a two-part song form, with suggestions of a development section. The melody is by far the dominating element. It reveals a great warmth of expression and many charming delicacies of line-leading. Harmonically, the predilection for triad effects whereby the tonal center is frequently changed is noticeable. The development and interweaving of tonal relationships by thirds has been retained as an essential characteristic of Hindemith's music. The second movement follows in "the measure of a very slow march." Its three-part form is completed by a reprise with development sections. It is succeeded by a lively scherzo which increases in tempo to a typical "motoristic" cheerfulness, then spreads out in a broad harmonic middle portion. With its fiery sweep, its arabesque-like themes, its octave passages, this movement is pianistically the most grateful piece that Hindemith has written, his most virtuoso effort.* The scherzo movement in its instrumental technic is a development which can be traced back to the *Suite*, 1922 and *Kammermusik*, Opus 37. The fourth movement of the sonata is a reprise of the first, slightly altered. Programmatically, one might refer to this

*Walter Gieseking announced the premiere of this sonata for his piano concert in Berlin, in November 1936, but then withdrew it.

as another view of, a return perhaps, to the Main, in the meaning of Hölderlin's verses. Most powerful of all is the finale, a widely sweeping form, whose weight and proportions fit into no known scheme. It covers eleven pages of print and expands the sonata form to embrace so to speak, the art of landscape. A broadly comprehensive thematic material is presented and musically shaped always in new combinations, in harmonic, polyphonic and rhythmic interpretations.

Compared to the first sonata, the second suffers from a kind of pallor. The prevailing joy in play emphasizes the absence of that frenzy which was previously the mark of Hindemith's music, even in its apparently anti-emotional, motorized passages. The finale-rondo is mentioned only as a miniature masterpiece of his art; it utilizes a charming D-major theme, extracting all the possibilities of composition by a witty exploitation of a stereotyped interval of the fifth. With a melancholy question mark, the rondo passes off into a slow coda.

The sonata form is most rigorously followed in the last work of this opus. It has more definite tonal outlines than the second and is pianistically brilliant. Its greatest inspiration seems to be in the terminal pieces, a lively first movement, filled with clear beauty of form, and a fugue which closes the work. Its characteristic tritone progression is driven into the consciousness of the hearer by four voices interwoven in bold counterpoint. Interpolated are a dance-like scherzo and a slower movement, rhythmically and pianistically charming.

TONAL TENDENCIES

Much has been said about Hindemith's return to an unambiguous tonality. But it was, after all, only in a few of his early works that he abandoned it. There is no doubt, however, that he has made a harmonic simplification in his latest sonatas which must be taken as a reaction against the dissonance technic of modern music. The *Piano Sonatas*, as well as *Schwanendreher* maintain the principle of tonal unity. The first is in A-major, the second in G-major, the third in B \flat -major. And the connective sections are also, without exception, in related keys. Harmonically, Hindemith works a great deal with triad effects, even in tonic-

dominant patterns. But he does not surrender the freedom of modulation known to modern music. There are polyphonic passages, sharply dissonant groupings, and decidedly heterophonic parts; single themes almost seem to conform to the twelve-tone principle.

In all his discussion Hindemith proceeds on the theory that music today has no more technical problems to solve. He maintains that modern music has at its disposal all the resources that are available in occidental music within the limits of the chromatic tonal system. Only the legitimacy of this material has not been universally discovered.

In contrast to Schönberg and Hauer, Hindemith has developed a system of tonal laws that includes all harmonic phenomena of even the most modern music, but which derives from tonal foundations. Through the most complicated physical calculations, he is determined to bring all problems of composition into this system. This means a revolution in harmonic theory, especially the tearing down of Riemann's doctrine of function. For many years Hindemith has been using this system of tonal logic in his teaching of composition; now he is about to set it forth in a book, presenting analyses and examples, from the Gregorian chorale to Stravinsky. His doctrine eliminates certain branches of musical instruction and replaces them with new ones. Hindemith is so consistent in the application of his theory, that he has revised one of his most important works, *Das Marienleben*, according to this point of view, and will soon issue it in the new form.

PRESENT OUTLOOK

One of Hindemith's greatest recent achievements has been the activity for which he was commissioned by the Turkish government. In Angora he has laid the foundations for a fruitful musical life for the Turkish state, according to the best European models. Music schools, symphony orchestras, an academy for music teachers, have been established according to his specifications and with his effective cooperation have been lifted out of a primitive, medieval condition. His scheme, which reveals a remarkable world-outlook and practical knowledge, includes the musical education of the whole Turkish nation even to the most

remote province. His success is already apparent. Its most remarkable feature is the fact that this plan cherishes and nurtures the native characteristics of Turkish music, its separation from Arabian culture, as well as the possibilities of its development into a many-sided art in an occidental sense.

Hindemith too has profited by his contact with this young, exotic culture. Turkey's music has only one means of expression—melody. It corresponds in development to the level which Europe had reached in the first thousand years, A.D. Hindemith could not react romantically by introducing the exotic peculiarities of Turkish music into his own. But his sense of absolute melody has been strengthened, his lines have gained in form, in logic, in expression. Perhaps this development has taken place at the expense of harmonic-tonal riches, but it has brought treasures to modern music which the world cannot ignore.