PAUL HINDEMITH (1895-1963)

Five traits characterize the man Paul Hindemith: his extensive experience as a performing artist; his endeavors to bring contemporary music to a wider audience; his enthusiasm with education; his respect for, and active promotion of, early music; and his outstanding wit and sense of humor. Hindemith began as a violinist, being appointed concert-master at the Frankfurt Opera at age 19. Later he had a brilliant career as one of Europe's foremost viola soloists and founded the famous Amar Quartet, with whom he toured widely. Other instruments on which he was an accomplished performer include the viola d'amore, the piano and the clarinet.

Paul Hindemith's Duo Sonatas For Orchestral Instruments And Piano

In the course of Hindemith's development there were two phases during which he dedicated himself primarily to the composition of sonatas: the time from 1917 to around 1924, and the time from 1935 to the late 40s (and, for a few pieces, even beyond). Politically, the two periods seem to have much in common; they comprise the hardest years of World War I with its aftermath and the entire World War II, including the difficult years preceding its outbreak. In terms of the composer's attitude, however, the two periods could hardly be more different. When composing the earlier sonatas, Hindemith relies on the string instruments with which he was most familiar: the violin, viola and violoncello. His declared goal is to widen the "territory of expressive possibilities" by creating a number of works that explore not only different structures but also entirely different characters.

In a letter of 28 September 1918, Hindemith outlines his plan half seriously, half facetiously: *I want to write a whole series of such... small sonatas... Each is to have a character entirely distinct from the previous one, and a unique structure. I am*

curious whether in such a series I shall succeed in stretching the expressive possibilities—which, in this form and setting, are not all that large to begin with—and to push them against the horizon. Several years may pass until I complete this work, provided I live to see it completed. I think it will be an interesting task. I only pity the poor people who may, some twenty years from now, purchase tickets, lured by the following poster hung by two enthusiastic but no longer quite sound-minded musicians.

12 Sonata Recitals, 1 -12 February 1938
The program will consist of all small sonatas for piano and violin by P. H.

1. E^b major　　　*4. Dorian*　　　　　　　　*7. "Mit dem Paukenschlag"*
2. D minor　　　　*5. Variation on a Single Pitch*　*8. In triple counterpoint*
3. without tonality　*6. F minor and A major mixed*　*9. With Light and Colors, etc.*

As the draft of the fictitious program shows, Hindemith's original plan had been to explore the various styles, structures and characters within an even more narrowly defined genre, that of the sonata for piano and violin. A year later, with the completion of his extraordinary sonata for viola and piano, this plan was obsolete, and further compositions carry the generic heading "Sonatas for String Instruments."
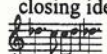
By the time Hindemith returns to the composition of duo sonatas in 1935, his aesthetics has changed completely. He now operates from a firmly established stylistic basis and turns to ever new, even traditionally outlandish settings. Once again, Hindemith commits himself to realizing his approach in an extensive series of sonatas that eventually, with the double bass sonata of 1949 and the tuba sonata added six years afterwards, engages all string and wind instruments of the symphony orchestra in a dialogue with the piano.

Paul Hindemith's Sonatas for String Instruments and Piano

Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 11, no. 1, in E$^\flat$

What did Hindemith "explore" in these two movements, as he said he intended to do anew in each of his sonatas? One way of looking at the sonata is in terms of contrast and integration. The two movements are strikingly different in character. Yet they are so complementary in their difference that one appreciates the composer's decision to refrain from writing the customary third movement, all the more since each movement contains within itself several strongly diverse moods. Spanning all differences are several aspects that hold the two movements and their various thematic ideas together. All of them are playful devices, yet the music they inform is often deep, soulful and, especially in the slow movement, almost transfigured. Hindemith plays in intriguing ways with the supposedly straight-forward E$^\flat$ major tonality and with the three-four time. Melodically, all thematic material derives, in ever new ways, from the basic cell of a short-long pattern, either as a repeated note or as an ascending half step. Structurally, Hindemith surprises us with palindromes, mirror-symmetrical arrangements.

The opening sonata movement consists of an exposition with two contrasting themes and a short closing idea, a development section, and a recapitulation. However, the recapitulation unfolds in inverse order, beginning with the closing idea and ending with the principal theme, thus creating a palindromic design: A B C, development, C B A. All material plays with the repeated note. Theme 1 is based on a trumpet motif, and what we hear is clearly a march. What we don't hear but discover to our amazement in the score

theme 1 as we hear it

and as it is written

E$^\flat$ major/G major/B major

theme 2

closing idea

is that the equally spaced "left, right, left, right" of this march is written, throughout the theme's 20 bars, with total negligence of the self-imposed bar lines—as though to make fun of metric order. But that is not the only mischievous device the composer uses here. Hardly have we recognized the conventional gesture of the fanfare and the solid E♭ major in which it seems embedded, than Hindemith takes us on a tonal roller-coaster ride, moving in ever new circles through the major chords built over the notes of an augmented triad instead of establishing any one context! Theme 2 balances this. Very soft and much calmer, its tune swings in a gentle dialogue of the two instruments. The closing idea fills one note repetition with another on the lower semitone, thus paving the way for the thematic semitone steps in the second movement. Long before it gets there, however, this languid little motif generates a surprisingly dramatic development section. As a result, the "layout of moods" in this movement is also perfectly palindromic: vigorous, gentle, languid, dramatic, languid, gentle, vigorous.

Movement II, 'In the tempo of a slow, solemn dance', picks up much of the structural play. Its first section is conceived as a palindrome, the basic

rhythmic cell is again the short-long note repetition, and its melodic version, used in a number of ingeniously different ways throughout the piece, the rising semitone.

Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 11, no. 4

This sonata is unique both in its structure and the choice of its melodic gestures. The thematic material is based on various components of European folk idiom. The opening movement, called *Fantasy*, is a traditional Romanze in 6/8 time, the 'Theme' of the second movement is explicitly labeled *wie ein Volkslied* (like a folk song), and

the two themes of the *Finale* present a vigorous Balkan dance contrasted with what may be heard as a lyrical Alpine song. All these materials interweave in a unique way. Not only does Hindemith request that the three movements run into each other without any interruption, but both the second and the third movements are laid out with variations—in continuous counting! And as though that was not enough, the composer has conceived the tempo development in such a way that there is a gradual increase of the pace from the *Fantasy* to the beginning of the *Finale*, thus stringing the movements together also in this regard.

Yet this is by no means the end to the surprises. The *Fantasy-Romanze* also uses a kind of variation technique. After its initial four-bar phrase, it alternates between new combinations of the bars and variations of the phrase in the original order. Something similar is true for the supposed 'variations' in the other two movements. These do many things other than varying a theme, but also alternate the new with transformations of the old. Many of the variations actually introduce material all of their own and then overlay or contrast it with components heard before.

The 'folk song' that inspires most of the variations is set in a delightfully changing meter. The first variation introduces material that has no connection to the folk song but is instead related in mood and meter to the *Romanze*. Variation II sets out with entirely new material which soon establishes a contrapuntal interplay with the folk song. Variation III surprises us with a different folk song, but assures its integration into the whole by using the same contrasting phrase as the thematic folk song. The fourth variation presents an energetic climax by presenting the original folk song in polymetric play, i.e. in a setting where each part follows a different grouping of the beats.

The *Finale* serves two designs at once. As a movement in its own right, it mimics a sonata form in that it presents two idiosyncratic themes, a 'Balkan dance' and a lyrical 'Viennese song'; both are recapitulated after a developmental section. At the same time, however, the *Finale* also serves as a continuation of the process that informs the second movement. In this regard, the two themes are new material interspersed after the previous variation on the folk song. The passage that follows the themes is labeled variation V and based on a rhythmically varied version of the folk song (with a contrast reminiscent of the *Romanze* and a closure from the *Finale's* main theme, thus pulling all three movements together). The developmental section of the *Finale's* sonata layout doubles as variation VI and comes as a *fugato* on the folk song and Romanze material. (Hindemith, as if wishing to mock our idea of a *fugato* as something very serious, demands this variation as 'purposefully clumsy'). Finally, the recurrence of the two *Finale* themes acts once more as alternating material; it is logically followed by a recapitulation of variation V (the rhythmically varied folk song). The coda presents yet another variation, playing with the folk song in ever-growing excitement.

Sonata for Viola d'amore and Piano, Op. 25, no. 2

The shortest of the string sonatas, this piece is both musically and technically highly accomplished, attesting to Hindemith's intimacy with the period instrument. Especially movements I and III in their extended use of D major allow the sympathetic strings to resonate and give the otherwise weaker-sounding voice a wonderful support.

The first movement, in moderate tempo and "good spirits," is partially fugal, with transitional passages in double stops for which the seven-stringed instrument is particularly suited. It leads *attacca* into the next—once again: two movements or three?

The second movement presents itself as a very slow meditation. Its contrasting central section posits continuous syncopation and, later, polytonality against what amounts to an ornamentation of a single pitch.

The third movement, also ternary in design, is framed by raucously virtuoso sections. They surround a middle section in which the duo partners never once find themselves in the same meter but, nonetheless, achieve a touching mood of strange naiveté. In the wake of the retransition, even this innocence gets infected with the boisterous energy of the main material, and the piece ends in a show of force.

Sonata for Violoncello and Piano, Op. 11, no. 3

Hindemith's cello sonata op. 11, no. 3 presents yet another intriguing solution to the question of the sonata design. Ostensibly in two movements, it actually encompasses four. They are clearly set apart by their structural layout, character, material and, in the case of the two halves of movement I, even by a conspicuous halt in the musical pace. However, as we compare the order of the characters and forms represented here with those realized in customary four-movement sonatas, we see in our mind's eye the composer's famous mocking smile—since what he gives us overthrows our expectations in more than one way, and by doing so, creates a delightful new *Gestalt*.

The first half of movement I consists entirely of 16th-notes and 16th-triplets fitted into 'moderately fast quarter-notes', in a mood described as 'with force'. The regular 16ths appear mostly as broken chords whose vigorous zigzag motion is contrasted in the swift curves of the triplets. Jointly, these two building blocks presented in the piano soon engage in dialogue between the two instruments where they form imitative patterns, rudimentary contrapuntal play and finally a three-part *unison*. In the sketch of the revised version of the sonata, Hindemith had first marked this *toccata*

section *fugue*. In the fair copy, he substituted *prelude* but finally deleted both. Under whatever name, this *toccata* presents a remarkable attempt at a new orientation on Baroque models in Hindemith's early chamber music.

main theme

By contrast, the second half of movement I is laid out as a complex sonata movement form, with material that is as distinctly characterized as it is complementary. The main theme, in a section designated as 'lively, very energetic', serves as a frame. Inside it, the secondary theme presents a passionate *cantilena* in a character described as 'sustained'. This song, heard in many different settings, in turn frames a development section that, 'calmer' still, pits a very subdued version of the emphatic *cantilena* against a gentle reminiscence of the originally so vigorous main theme.

In today's scores, movement II of the sonata for violoncello and piano appears simply as a composite of sections marked 'slow' and 'very lively'. Earlier copies are more evocative; Hindemith had originally chosen *In the Reed. Funeral procession* and *Bacchanale* as headings for the two halves. Especially the first title suggests a concrete poetic source. As his diaries reveal, when sketching the cello sonata in August 1919 he was working on his Whitman Hymns for baritone and piano, which contain two texts that may have inspired Hindemith's choice of wording:

Sing on there in the swamp!   *Sing on, dearest brother, warble your reedy song*
Oh singer bashful and tender!   *Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.*

The 'slow' section captures this mood admirably. In what seems like an attempt to render the self-contained purposelessness of nature—here the fauna and flora in the reed—Hindemith conceived both the refrain and the two episodes as melismatic plays around a few central notes, thus creating an atmosphere of eerie beauty.

After a *funeral procession*, what could be more shocking than a *bacchanal*, that Dionysian festival of wine and sensual pleasures? We hear the drunken ecstasy associated with these Greek revelings in the way Hindemith shapes his themes. Each of the two beats in the bar is split in almost any possible way. Besides this array of metric surprises, the music is full of chromatic progressions—as if to epitomize wildness and a protest against any rules, be they metric or tonal.

Sonata for Double Bass and Piano (1949)

This sonata is in three movements. Or is it? The first and second, *Allegretto* and *Scherzo. Allegro assai* respectively, are short and similarly playful. Not separately but only in conjunction can they balance the extensive, multifaceted third movement that is not only long and weighty but actually presents itself as 'three-in-one'. Thus, once again, the question after the number of movements cannot be answered in any simple way; and once again, this is part of what makes this piece intriguing.

The first movement begins with a theme whose character will remind many a listener of the animal most often associated with the sound of the double bass: the elephant (see the 'Elephant's Dance' from Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of Animals*). This purposefully clumsy main theme, which the piano mimics, is soon contrasted by an exquisite-

main theme

ly graceful second theme. Reserved entirely for the piano, it is accompanied by *pizzicati* in the bass. But as if to demonstrate how much heart there is in so bulky an animal, the bass emerges with a beautifully lyrical tune. Reversing the process, the recurrence of the piano's graceful theme leads back to the 'elephant' theme of the beginning. But the movement does not end here. Before the piano can retort, we hear something like an extended parenthetical comment. In the softest of shades and almost

shy in character, it seems as though both instruments prepare to disappear. No wonder, then, that the piano's belated mimic of the 'elephant' theme sounds reluctant and is quickly interrupted by a string of bars that reiterate the announcement of impending retreat in new words, as it were. When the main theme makes its final appearance, it is hushed to *pp* and handed back and forth from one instrument to the other.

The *Scherzo* begins where the *Allegretto* left off—in very soft tone color. The character, however, is changed considerably. This piece exudes fun and mockery. The bass presents a melody that is as lighthearted as the instrument can be. As if set to tease and confuse its partner, the piano counters with long stretches of off-beat chords. Towards the end of the piece, this mischievous effort even seems to win out. The bass melody is completely fragmented, while the piano continues its upsetting mockery until it can be sure to have driven the partner out.

Movement III comprises an extended *Molto Adagio*, a *Recitativo* and a *Lied*. Within the slow section, a very expressive, plaintive melody provides the frame for a long development. In it, a motif derived from the main melody wanders through the voices, exploring a whole palette of different densities and colors, from the pale through the virtuoso to the powerful. *Recitativo* and *Lied* both pick up aspects of the *Adagio* theme, albeit very different ones. The recitative claims the plaintive character. In a sequence of phrases freed of any regular metric pulse,

both instruments speak and sigh with abandon. The *Lied*, by contrast, lets go of the *Adagio's* character in favor of a return to the playful attitude of the sonata's earlier movements, but secretly—in a format that cannot but escape any unsuspecting listener—recasts the pitch outline.

Notes by Siglind Bruhn

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This series of four compact discs features 15 duo sonatas — five each for the various instruments of the woodwind, brass, and string families — as well as two cyclical works for solo piano.

Sonata for Violin and Piano in E♭, op. 11, no. 1 (1918)*   **Andrew Jennings:** *violin*, **Siglind Bruhn:** *piano*
1. Frisch
2. Im Zeitmaß eines langsamen, feierlichen Tanzes

Sonata for Viola and Piano in F. op. 11, no. 4 (1919)‡   **Yizhak Schotten:** *viola*, **Katherine Collier:** *piano*
3. Fantasie. Ruhig
4. Thema mit Variationen. Ruhig und einfach wie ein Volkslied
5. Finale (mit Variationen)

Sonata for Viola d'amore and Piano op. 25, no.2 (1923)*   **Bruce Smith:** *viola d'amore*, **Siglind Bruhn:** *piano*
6. Mäßig schnell. Lustig
7. Sehr langsam
8. Sehr lebhaft

Sonata for Violoncello and Piano op. 11, no. 3 (1919)*   **Anthony Elliott:** *violoncello*, **Anton Nel:** *piano*
9. Mäßig schnelle Viertel. Mit Kraft — Lebhaft, sehr markiert
10. Langsam — Sehr lebhaft

Sonata for Double Bass and Piano (1949)◊   **Derek Weller:** *double bass*, **Siglind Bruhn:** *piano*
11. Allegretto
12. Scherzo
13. Molto Adagio — Lied