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.

<center>

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

</center>

1. E^b major
2. D minor
3. without tonality

4. Dorian
5. Variation on a Single Pitch
6. F minor and A major mixed

7. "Mit dem Paukenschlag"
8. In triple counterpoint
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 Woodwind Instruments and Piano

Sonata for Flute and Piano (1936)

What holds the otherwise very different movements of this sonata together is Hindemith's ingenious play with rhythms and tonalities—rhythms that seem laid out to confuse listeners but end up delighting us and tonalities that are juxtaposed in such a way that our theory textbooks would scream out loud were it not for our reassurance that this sounds... beautiful.

The first movement explores the different nuances of what the designation "serene" may encompass. The main theme itself comprises two components: one optimistic, characterized by repeated rising motion, the other more solemn, with a heavy triple note-repetition concluded by a falling gesture. As the theme is tossed back and forth from one instrument to the other, the optimistic component takes over entirely, and the solemn component is not heard again for a long while. Later, the secondary theme continues this trend, sounding even more exuberant and light-hearted than the first. Only a short closing motif introduces a wistful element. In the development, the main theme (again represented, to nobody's surprise, only by its optimistic component), is accompanied by rhythms evoking a spooky march, and the second theme picks up this playful attitude by wrapping itself in what sounds like glittering drops of water. Throughout all this, the 4/4 time suggests a normalcy not always born out by the music. While the main theme limits itself to teasing our sense of order with a few odd accents, the second theme does not respect the metric framework at all, leaving us

completely in the dark as to where we are to expect heavy and light beats. For this, we have to wait until the coda. Here, the solemn component of the main theme is finally developed in adequate depth. Considerably slower than originally presented, it appears in a setting reminiscent of a chorale—thus exploring yet another nuance of "serenity."

Between the B♭ major that is predominant in the first movement and the B♭ major in movement III, the tonality of the second movement, the Dorian mode on B, seems out of this world. In a tempo indicated as "very slow," notes linger in suspensions and double-dotted rhythms as though they regretted leading us to the end of what must be one of the most mesmerizingly beautiful movements Hindemith has written.

The third movement is laid out as a two-in-one. It begins "very lively" with a *gigue*, a swift dance whose name derives from the gig, the two-wheeled carriage, and whose basic rhythm is strongly reminiscent of what a ride over cobble-stoned streets must have felt like. Even here, in this straightforward dance, Hindemith smuggles in short spans where it is all but clear "where we are in the bar." And the same holds true for the second half of the movement, a stately *march*. While this genre is ostensibly clear-cut in its binary timing (left, right, left, right—no changes in the foot pattern, please), we actually wonder towards the end of almost every phrase which foot is due, as Hindemith inserts groups of "3," large and small. But just before our puzzled feet want to give up moving, the composer reaffirms the walking order. This is gentle, friendly, playful teasing.

Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1938)

The rhythmic teasing of "is it 1-2-1-2 (as the wind instrument suggests) or is it 1-2-3-1-2-3 (as we hear in the piano)?" continues in the sonata for oboe and piano.

The first movement, whose character is designated as "frisky," begins with a principal theme in which the oboe tries to uphold simple time against a persistent waltz accompaniment. By the time the second theme enters, the two instruments seem to have reached a truce and agreed to alternate two bars of triple time with two bars of duple time. The third theme, however, is utterly ambiguous, featuring 2/4 time in the tune against groups of 3/8 in the leading accompaniment and 3/16 in the figure work!

"closing theme":

groups of
- 2/4
- 3/16
- 3/8

In the long, compound second movement, Hindemith explores the interlocking and interrelationship of forms. The movement begins "very slow" with an intimate oboe *cantilena*. When. after a while, the oboe picks up the piano figuration and allows its partner to take over the melodic lead, the piano breaks the calm mood with dotted rhythms and sudden virtuoso runs. Hardly has the original composure been restored than the piano launches an entirely new, bouncy section that is indicated as "lively." Eventually, the piano's dotted rhythms and runs and the calm *cantilena* return, as though the piece were to conclude as a palindrome.

But then, interrupting in mid-phrase before the close is reached, the piano unexpectedly embarks on a fugue! And as if this were not enough, close inspection reveals that the *cantilena* of the "very slow" section, the theme of the "lively" section, and the fugue subject are all related by sharing the same basic pitch outline.
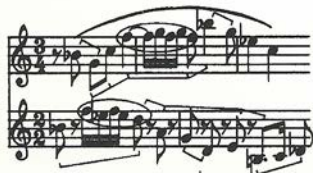

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (1939)

The sonata for clarinet and piano is the first of the duo sonatas to be laid out with four separate movements: a "moderately" paced opening in sonata movement form, a "lively" second piece, a ter-nary third movement desig-nated "very slow," and a finale described by Hindemith as a "Little Rondo" in "comfortable" tempo.

Movements I and III are ternary, each with two analogous sections interrupted by a contrast. The second movement emphasizes the equality of the duo partners: the clarinet presents a long passage which is then repeated in its entirety with the piano in the lead. Only after this is concluded does the clarinet introduce and develop a second theme; again, theme and development are repeated in the piano. (Here, however, the clarinet gets somewhat impatient with the accompanying role and throws in snippets from the first theme.)

main theme "moderate" (I) inverted in main theme "lively" (II)

main theme "moderate" (I) varied in main theme "very slow" (III)

Since the structural design of each of these three movements is very straightforward, our attention is directed towards the thematic inter-relationship. Where the flute sonata surprises us when we discover that the three ostensibly different themes of its second movement are all variations of one idea, the clarinet sonata goes even one step further. Here, the themes of the first three movements can all be heard as variations of one idea: that of consecutive fourth intervals (shown with angular forks), broken up with some ornamentation (marked with elliptical enclosures).

Finally, the "Little Rondo" is intriguing mainly with regard to the 'cooperation' of the duo partners. In the refrain, they seem to get along well, alternating in claiming attention and agreeing easily on a shared metric order. In the first episode, things are not so settled: the clarinet continues in duple time while the piano suddenly insists on triple meter. In the second episode, the question does not center on order as such but, more basically, on when to begin, resulting in a three-part canon. After each show of independence, however, consent is restored and the sonata ends in charming simplicity.

Sonata for English Horn and Piano (1941)

The six tempi in this sonata are grouped ambiguously; we cannot be quite sure whether there are three movements (with two tempi each) or, more likely, only two (with four tempi in movement II). Much more interesting than the division into movements is how the six tempi hang together. A close look at the structural design reveals that the entire sonata is conceived as a two-tempo movement with two variations.

The opening is marked "Slow." The English horn presents three expressive phrases accompanied by a rhythmically almost unchanging piano part. In the central section, there is more dialogue both in the sense that the two instruments are now listening to each other rather than only going in tandem and in that the piano imitates a long melodic phrase, relegating the swift accompaniment figures to its partner. The "slow" tempo ends with a recapitulation of the initial section. Without interruption, a very much contrasting *Allegro pesante* follows, introduced by repetitive piano figures in straight metric order and with strong accents. Again, the piano does little to cut into the supremacy of its partner, leaving the bouncing main theme and the more swinging secondary idea entirely to the English horn and only gaining some degree of independence in the coda. What is intriguing in this ostensibly simple piece is that the two instruments play throughout in two different keys. The piano's "home key," F, is confirmed at the end of the coda with a cadence into F minor. By contrast, the tonal center of the English horn, C, remains unresolved. The "soloist," listening to the suddenly active accompanist, fails, as it were, to leave his G in time to return to C!

In the pair of tempi that follows at the beginning of the variation block, we recognize the expressive melody from the opening in a structurally analogous section marked "Moderate." Here the piano takes the melodic lead, keeping the English horn entirely excluded from the main section.

That, however, is not all. The piano is clearly no longer ready to be obliging. Instead, it deliberately confuses the expected order of the 9/8 time with 2+2+2+2+1 and constant off-beat chords in the contrasting phrase. Heartened, it seems, by this degree of metric freedom, the English horn launches a *Scherzo* varia-

tion of the former *Allegro pesante* that completely redefines the initial rhythm. As if joining into the disrespectful game, the piano completes this phrase "in the wrong key." Continuing the irreverent joke, the next "Moderate," the variation II of the "Slow" section, now features an entirely transformed rhythm in both melody and accompaniment. It is not until the final *Allegro pesante* that some semblance of order is restored. Here, the horn keeps close to the original form of the bouncy theme, while the less

lenient piano continues to disturb the metric order with *hemiolas* (**1** 2 **3** 1 **2** 3 instead of **1** 2 3 **1** 2 3). Tonally, the coda with the "missed" resolution is extended and thus allows the English horn to return to its "home key." The two instruments end the sonata each according to its own logic, uncompromisingly in two different keys.

Sonata for Bassoon and Piano (1938)

More than any other instrument, the lowest member in the woodwind family is capable of conveying playfulness, mockery, even irony. Hindemith employs all these colors in his sonata for bassoon and piano, mixing them with passages of true lyrical expression that sound all the more touchingly earnest in a voice that seems made for mischievous utterances. Of the two movements, the first, "'lightly moving," is simple in structure and, with its swinging 6/8 time and song-like themes, reminiscent of a "Romanze," an intimate, tender, possibly flirtatious piece.

Movement II, by contrast. is a compound form with a variety of moods, tempi, and colors. Its first section, marked "slow," features a languid tune accompanied by irregular 'waves', interspersed with short passages where the piano joins its duo partner as a second melodic voice or, later, as an imitating rival, before it retreats again into the picturesque background. Rather surprisingly, this mood gives way to a march—or rather, a parody of a march. (Written during Hindemith's last year in Germany before he yielded to Nazi intimidations, it is clear whom this march is mocking.) Embedded in the march are two inserts built on the same material, of which the first, indicated as "trio," is very gentle. In its second appearance, however, the "trio" melody grows much louder and the accompaniment in long strings of mockingly prancing notes reveals the infectious power of the march burlesque. A short, transitional gesture leads into another lyrical section, marked "Conclusion, Pastorale. Calm." In this complex movement with the sequence "slow"—"march-trio-march-trio"—"calm," this section acts as a counterpart to the initial section. At the same time, its 6/8 meter invites us to hear it in correspondence to the sonata's first movement—a connection reinforced by shared motifs.

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 Flute and Piano (1936)*   **Leone Buyse:** *flute*, **Siglind Bruhn:** *piano*
- 1. Heiter bewegt
- 2. Sehr langsam
- 3. Sehr lebhaft—Marsch

Sonata for Oboe and Piano (1938)   **Harry Sargous:** *oboe*, **Siglind Bruhn:** *piano*
- 4. Munter
- 5. Sehr langsam—Lebhaft

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano (1939)   **Fred Ormand:** *clarinet*, **Anton Nel:** *piano*
- 6. Mäßig bewegt
- 7. Lebhaft
- 8. Sehr langsam
- 9. Kleines Rondo, gemächlich

Sonata for English Horn and Piano (1941)   **Harry Sargous:** *English horn*, **Anton Nel:** *piano*
- 10. Slow
- 11. Allegro pesante
- 12. Moderate
- 13. Scherzo, fast
- 14. Moderate
- 15. Allegro pesante

Sonata for Bassoon and Piano (1938)   **Richard Beene:** *bassoon*, **Siglind Bruhn:** *piano*
- 16. Leicht bewegt
- 17. Langsam—Beschluß: Pastorale. Ruhig

* Tonmeister: Michael Webster, Harry Sargous Tonmeister on all other works

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