

**Paul Hindemith**  
Das Marienleben (1923)  
*“Vom Tode Mariä I”*

❖ Hindemith – Background

- Born November 16, 1895 in Hanau, Germany.
- Began violin lessons with Eugen Reinhardt in 1902, and continued violin studies with Swiss violinist Anna Hegner in 1907. Then, in 1908, Anna Hegner left Frankfurt and arranged for Hindemith to study first privately with Adolf Rebner [her own teacher] and then from the winter semester onwards to continue with Rebner on a scholarship at the Hoch Konservatorium in Frankfurt,<sup>1</sup> where he studied violin exclusively, at first.
- “After numerous attempts to compose, Hindemith obtained grants and the support of wealthy Frankfurt families that enabled him to add composition study to his training at the Hoch Conservatory.”<sup>2</sup>
  - Studied composition in 1912 with the compositionally conservative Arnold Mendelssohn (organist, and son of the cousin of Felix Mendelssohn), and with modernist Bernhard Sekles in 1913 after Mendelssohn had fallen ill.
  - “Rather than following one particular compositional school, he adapted many varied influences, including the styles of Brahms, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Mahler and Reger.”<sup>3</sup>
- First violinist of Frankfurt Opera Orchestra in 1914, promoted to deputy leader the same year, then to leader in 1917.
- Became second violinist with Rebner’s string quartet in 1915.
- Called for military service in 1917, and joins his regiment in 1918. Plays bass drum with his assigned regimental band.
  - Formed a string quartet and continued composing while in the army.
- “At the end of the war Hindemith returned to the Frankfurt Opera as leader, and to the Rebner Quartet, but, at his own request, as a viola player rather than a violinist.”<sup>4</sup>
- June 1919, Hindemith organized a “composition evening” in Frankfurt, a concert consisting solely of Hindemith’s works. The even was a success and, consequently, B. Schott’s Söhne, Mainz, offered to publish his works, and remained his sole publisher.

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<sup>1</sup> Hindemith Foundation, “Life: Biography”; available from <http://www.hindemith.org/E/paul-hindemith/life.htm>; Internet; accessed 18 February 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Giselher Schubert: 'Hindemith, Paul: Early Life', Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 18 February 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, “World War I and the early 1920s”.

- First performance of String Quartet no. 3 in 1921, for which Hindemith founded the Amar Quartet (named for the first violinist Licco Amar).
- Discovered the the viola d'amore in 1922, and began to explore and perform early music.
- “In 1923, however, after negotiating with Schott for a guaranteed monthly income, he was able to leave the Frankfurt Opera orchestra [though he did remain active with the Amar Quartet]. He became a member of the programme committee of the Donaueschingen Festival which, with him as its driving force, became one of the most important centres of contemporary music in the 1920s.”<sup>5</sup>
  - Performances of his works at this Festival brought him international attention as a composer.<sup>6</sup>
  - (Interesting note: During 1923, he also played the solo violin part in the German premiere of Stravinsky’s *L’Histoire du Soldat*.)
- 1924, married Gertrud Rottenberg.
- “In 1927 Hindemith was invited to teach composition at the Berlin Musikhochschule [Academy of Music]. His open-mindedness, curiosity and breadth of knowledge made him an ideal teacher. He tended to overburden and thus discourage his pupils, however, who, only a few years younger than himself, he otherwise treated as comrades. He soon arrived at the conclusion that composition, strictly speaking, could not be taught; only the craft of how to handle musical materials could be passed on.”<sup>7</sup>
  - One of the first composers to offer courses in film music, assisted in the development of the trautionium, and contributed to the work of the Hochschule’s radio research department.
- 1929, left the Amar Quartet and founded a string trio with Josef Wolfstahl and Emanuel Feuermann.
- Half of his works labeled “cultural Bolshevism” and banned, after 1933 election brought National Socialists [Nazis] to power.
  - “His string trio could only be performed abroad, he was scarcely ever asked to appear in Germany and his Jewish colleagues at the Berlin Musikhochschule lost their jobs. Initially, he was not particularly worried, as he regarded the National Socialists’ assumption of power to be a democratic change of government that would be short-lived and took it for granted that all those dismissed from their jobs would be reinstated as soon as a new party came to power.”<sup>8</sup>
  - “He began to write large numbers of songs on resigned, melancholy or despairing texts, setting them so that they gave an

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Bryan R. Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century: Style and Structure* (\_\_\_\_: Schirmer, 1996), 247.

<sup>7</sup> Schubert, ‘Hindemith, Paul: The Berlin Years’.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, ‘Hindemith, Paul: The Hindemith case’.

- unmistakable sign of his withdrawal into a state of ‘inner emigration’... He also started to work on the opera *Mathis der Maler* (1933–5)...placing the problematic relationship of politics, power, art and personal responsibility into a historical setting.”<sup>9</sup>
- 1934, Hindemith was vilified by Joseph Goebbels, the propagation minister, and took indefinite leave from his teaching position at the Berlin Academy of Music.
  - April 1935, Turkish government invited Hindemith to travel to Ankara and act as advisor to the organization of musical life in Turkey.
    - “He returned to Turkey in 1936 and 1937 to supervise the implementation of his ideas and to supplement them with new ones. In order to preserve his freedom to travel, he represented his work to the German authorities as being on behalf of German culture. At the same time, he helped Jewish musicians escape to Turkey.”<sup>10</sup>
  - 1936, performances of all of Hindemith’s works are banned by German government.
  - 1937, resigned from Berlin Hochschule and travelled to the USA for the first time.
  - 1938, emigrated to Switzerland and settled in Bluche.
  - 1940, left Switzerland for America. Began teaching composition at Yale University.
  - 1945, began a series of early music concerts, founding the Yale Collegium Musicum and playing instruments such as the fiddle, viol, viola d’amore and bassoon. “Through these concerts he exercised a powerful influence on historically informed performing practice in the USA.”<sup>11</sup>
  - 1946, became an American citizen and settled in New Haven, CT.
  - 1947-49, made trips to Europe, for conducting and teaching engagements, and visiting friends and family on the side.
  - 1949, accepted a teaching position with the University of Zürich.
    - “At first he tried to alternate between New Haven and Zürich (1951–3), but when his workload became too heavy he resigned from Yale. He settled in Switzerland in 1953 and spent the rest of his life in Blonay, a village above Lake Geneva between Montreux and Vevey.”<sup>12</sup>
    - Enthusiasm for teaching waned, and he turned to conducting, leaving little time for composing.
  - Died, December 28, 1963, in Frankfurt.

#### ❖ Compositional Output

- *see separate lists...*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, ‘Hindemith, Paul: Emigration to the USA’.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, ‘Hindemith, Paul: Return to Switzerland’.

- Works composed in 1923, with “Das Marienleben”:
  - Klaviermusik mit Orchester op. 29; Quintett für Klarinette und Streichquartett op. 30, original version; Sonate für Bratsche solo op. 31 Nr. 4; Kanonische Sonatine für zwei Flöten op. 31 Nr. 3; Lieder nach alten Texten op. 33; 5. Streichquartett op. 32; Der Dämon; Sonate für Violoncello allein op. 25 Nr. 3; "Minimax" Repertorium für Militärorchester
- “The dominant artistic trend of the 1920s was the so-called Neue Sachlichkeit...Neue Sachlichkeit thinking in music suggested that the style of a particular work should depend on the character and function chosen for it. Accordingly, Hindemith’s instrumental music of the period is somewhat eclectic, drawing on a wide variety of styles.”<sup>13</sup>
- “His [Hindemith’s] career is typical of his generation: a youthful period of experimentation gave way shortly after the First World War to a more traditional artistic orientation. In his early music, Hindemith dabbled in many of the experimental approaches to composition of his day: atonality, Expressionism, jazz, parody, and satire. None of these, however, was true to his deeply serious and philosophical nature, which emerged in his music by the mid-1920s.”<sup>14</sup>
- ❖ “Das Marienleben” (“The Life of Mary”) – 1923
  - First performed May 10, 1923 in Donaueschingen.
  - It is the first important work in Hindemith’s mature style, referred to as “objective” by German writers.<sup>15</sup>
  - “Hindemith’s music in the fifteen songs of this monumental collection is objective and coolly detached from the emotions of the text; the texture is predominantly contrapuntal, there is regularity of rhythm and meter, and traditional forms are employed.”<sup>16</sup>
  - Text is a cycle of 15 poems by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) of the same title. “It deals with major events in the life of the Virgin Mary as they are told in Scripture and traditional Christian lore. Rilke fluctuates between simple lyrics and flamboyant images. His Marian poems delve intensely into human emotions”.<sup>17</sup>
- ❖ “Vom Tode Mariä I” – Analysis (pg. 78, in Simms Anthology)
  - A setting of the first of the three concluding poems, “On the Death of Mary”, telling of Mary’s last days on earth. *Refer to Anthology for translation of text.*
  - “Hindemith’s setting is in ternary form, whose outer sections are variations upon a five-measure ground bass. As an expression of Mary’s

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, ‘Hindemith, Paul: The new objectivity’.

<sup>14</sup> Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century*, 246.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Bryan R. Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century: An Anthology* (\_\_\_\_: Schirmer, 1986), 78.

<sup>17</sup> Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century*, 246, 248.

dignity and majesty, the music is a severe polyphonic invention stripped of all extraneous details.”<sup>18</sup> – that of the baroque passacaglia.<sup>19</sup>

- “Other neoclassical elements of the setting reside in its rigidly contrapuntal texture, triadic points of arrival and departure, and regularity of rhythm and phrasing. The continuous motor rhythms, especially apparent in the right hand of the piano, enhance its relation to baroque music.”<sup>20</sup>
- While ground bass ostinato is typical of baroque music, the harmonic implications “are not realized in the chords of the upper voices except at cadences. The upper-voices move instead in rapidly changing diatonic patterns.”<sup>21</sup>
- “The contrasting middle section (mm. 27-58), typical of many baroque passacaglias, dispenses with the ground, although it continues in the form of continuous variations, now upon two motives in the right hand of the piano... These figures are varied by changing harmonizations in the piano and by a through-composed vocal line which focuses on the note G. The ‘tonality’ of G is reaffirmed at the end of the song by motion to a concluding G-major triad.”<sup>22</sup>
- Some points of interest:
  - Motive in m.12-13 is half-step higher than m.11-12; motive in m.14-15 is whole step lower than m. 14.
  - Unison G in m. 10; G minor chord in m. 26; solo G in m.37; repeated Gs in voice, m. 27/35/43/48
  - Motive in piano in B-section repeats itself directly, with varied endings pitch-wise.
  - R.H. piano in m. 59-73 (top of A’), direct repeat of m. 11-26; same is true of m.74-77a compared to m.1-4.
  - Vocal part m. 62-66, direct repeat of m.14-16, but with a varied ending; also m.72-75, repeat of m.7-9 (with pick-up); same is also true comparing m. 48-49 and 43-44.
  - Hindemith uses 4/4, and occasionally 2/4 in A sections. In B-section, he alternates between 3/4 and 2/4, with the occasional 6/16

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<sup>18</sup> Simms, *Anthology*, 78.

<sup>19</sup> Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century*, 248

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 248-9.

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