

PAUL HINDEMITH

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Born in Hanau, near Frankfurt am Main, on 16 November 1895, Paul Hindemith was taught the violin as a child. He entered Frankfurt's Hoch'sche Konservatorium, where he studied violin with Adolf Rebner, as well as conducting and composition with Arnold Mendelssohn, a cousin of Felix Mendelssohn but when Mendelssohn moved from Frankfurt he continued Bernhard Sekles, who was born in 1872. Then Paul studied with Fritz Bassermann where Paul's brother attended classes. At first, he supported himself by playing in dance bands and musical-comedy troupes. He became deputy leader of the Frankfurt Opera Orchestra in 1914, and was promoted to leader in 1917. He played second violin in the Rebner String Quartet from 1914. In 1921, he founded the Amar Quartet playing the viola, and extensively toured Europe.



Paul Hindemith at 28

In 1930, the one act opera *Das Nusch-Nuschi* was completed and declared to be obscene, as it tells a story of a man who was castrated because of his sins. Also condemned was the one act opera *Santa Susanna* in which a sex starved nun tears off the loincloth from Christ on the Cross. The text is by August Stramm. In 1919 there had been another one act opera *Murder Hoffnung der Frauen*. One cannot help but wonder why Hindemith set these immoral texts

To backtrack. In 1914 and 1915 there were instrumental pieces and a Cello Concerto all of which were destroyed and, his father was killed at Flanders He was 45 and had volunteered to join the German army. In 1917, Paul wrote seven works which were destroyed or unpublished, apart from his *Three Pieces for cello and piano*, his first published work, and it is both highly attractive and entertaining.

Paul was called up to the army in August 1917 and then was described as slim and five foot five inches tall. He was sent to the barracks in Frankfurt where he continued with composition and music making, *The Cello Concerto Op 3*, already referred to was premiered by Maurits Frank at the Hoch Conservatory in 1917 but the manuscript was destroyed in the Second World War as was the Hindemith house.

Confidence improved in 1918 with the *String Quartet no 1 in F minor Op 10*, two *Violin Sonata Op 11* but *Two Organ Pieces* were destroyed.. 1919 saw the two one act operas, two viola sonatas, one accompanied which is universally admired and a cello sonata. Three other works were unpublished..

It should be noted here that Hindemith is probably the finest composer of music for string instruments but then he could write for any instrument and for the orchestra with expertise and his orchestration is second to none. As a personal view, his *String Quartets* are superlative. The year 1920 saw the *Quartet no 2*, *Das Nusch-Nuschi.*, *Five Dance Pieces for piano* and an unpublished *Piano Sonata*. The following year saw *Santa Susanna* and the *String Quartet no 3*.

In 1922, some of his pieces were played in the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival at Salzburg, which first brought him to the attention of an international audience. Hindemith was very shy about his compositions It was the year of his first major piano work *Suite 1922* which, apparently, he did not like. There was also his first two *Kammermusiks*, one for small orchestra and the other called *Kleine Kammermusik* for wind quintet a delightfully engaging piece, and his first ballet *Der*

Damon. The following year, he began to work as an organizer of the Donaueschingen Festival, where he programmed works by several so-called avant garde composers, including Anton Webern and Arnold Schoenberg.

His writing for the piano is not his best. His Piano Music for piano left hand and orchestra Op 29 of 1923 does not convince nor does his Kammermusick no 2 for piano, string quartet and brass Op 36 number 1 but it has some very tender moments. The Piano Concerto of 1945 fairs much better but the finale is a medley Tres Fontane. Earlier, he had written Concert Music for piano, brass and two harps Op 49 which seems to be a mishmash of styles from Gabreli,Matthew Locke,Bach and others. The Four Temperaments for piano and string orchestra has some golden moments and was used as a ballet. The three piano sonatas all date from 1936. They present no technical difficulties but are a pleasure to play. An important work is Ludus Tonalis, studies in counterpoint, tonal organisation and piano playing. That year also saw the appearance of the fine Sonata for flute and piano.

He wrote many sonatas

G minor for solo violin 1917
E flat for violin and piano Op 11 no 1
D violin and piano Op 11 no 2
F viola and piano Op 11 no 4
Solo viola Op 11 no 5
Cello and piano op 11 no 3
Piano Op 17 unpublished
Solo viola Op 25 no, 1 (1922)
Little Sonata for viola d'amore Op 25 no 4 unpublished
Solo cello Op 25 no 3
Solo viola Op 31 no 4 unpublished
Solo violin Op 31 no 1
Solo violin Op31 no 2
E for violin and piano 1935
Three piano sonatas 1936
Sonata for flute and piano 1936
Solo viola 1937
Organ Sonata no 1 and 2 1937
Oboe and piano 1938
Piano four hands 1938
Bassoon and piano
C for viola and piano 1939
C for violin and piano
Clarinet and piano
Harp
Horn and piano
Trumpet and piano
Organ no 3 1940
English horn and piano 1941
Trombone and piano
Little sonata for cello and piano 1942
Two Pianos
Saxophone and piano 1943
Cello and piano 1948
Double bass and piano 1949
Four Horns 1952
Tuba and piano 1955

He married Gertrude Rottenberg in 1924 who was of a higher social standing than her husband who was conscious of the plebeian origins of his own parents. His father was Robert Rudolph who was a house painter with a great love of music and played the zither. He married Marie Sophie Warnecke who was born on 29 January 1868. Apart from Paul, there was a daughter, Toni, born on 20 February 1898 and Rudolph was born on 9 January 1900. Marie lived to be 81 and died on 23 November 1949

In 1927, he was appointed Professor at the Berliner Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. Hindemith wrote the music for Hans Richter's 1928 avant-garde film *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (*Vormittagsspuk*), although the score was subsequently lost, and he also acted in the film.

In 1929 he played the solo part in the premiere of William Walton's *Viola Concerto*, after Lionel Tertis, for whom it was written, turned it down. The hateful Elgar referred to this work as the abuse of the instrument but it is far better than anything this pompous British composer wrote.

During the 1930s, Hindemith made a visit to Cairo and several visits to Ankara where, at the invitation of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, he led the task of reorganizing Turkish music education and the early efforts for the establishment of the Turkish State Opera and Ballet. Towards the end of the 1930s, he made several tours to America as a viola and viola d'amore soloist.

Hindemith's relationship to the Nazis is a complicated one. Some condemned his music as degenerate, largely based on his early, sexually charged operas such as *Sancta Susanna* and, in December 1934, during a speech at the Berlin Sports Palace, Germany's Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, publicly denounced Hindemith as an atonal noisemaker.

Other officials working in Nazi Germany, though, thought that this composer might provide Germany with an example of a modern German composer, as by this time he was writing music based in tonality, with frequent references to folk music. The conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler's defence of Hindemith, published in 1934, takes precisely this line.

The controversy around his work continued throughout the thirties, with the composer falling in and out of favor with the Nazi hierarchy, He finally emigrated to Switzerland in 1938 partly because his wife was of partially Jewish ancestry.

In 1935, the Turkish government commissioned Hindemith to reorganize that country's musical education, and, more specifically, to prepare material for the Universal and Turkish Polyphonic Music Education Programme for all music-related institutions in Turkey, a feat which he accomplished to universal acclaim.

This development seems to have been supported by the Nazi regime:. It may have got him conveniently out of the way, yet at the same time he propagated a German view of musical history and education. Hindemith himself said he believed he was being an ambassador for German culture..

Hindemith did not stay in Turkey as long as many other émigrés. Nevertheless, he greatly influenced the developments of Turkish musical life and the Ankara State Conservatory owes much to his efforts. In fact, Hindemith was regarded as a "real master" by young Turkish musicians and he was appreciated and greatly respected.

In 1940, Hindemith emigrated to the United States. At the same time, he was codifying his musical language His teaching and compositions began to be affected by his theories, according to critics like Ernest Ansermet.. Once in the U.S. he taught primarily at Yale University where he had such notable students as Lukas Foss, Graham George, Norman Dello Joio, Mel Powell, Yehudi Wyner, Harold Shapero, Hans Otte, Ruth Schonthal, and Oscar-winning film director George Roy Hill. During this time he also gave the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard, from which the book *A Composer's*

World was extracted. Hindemith had a long friendship with Erich Katz, whose own compositions were influenced by him.

He became an American citizen in 1946, but returned to Europe in 1953, living in Zürich and teaching at the university there. Towards the end of his life, he began to conduct more, and made numerous recordings, mostly of his own music.

An anonymous critic writing in Opera magazine in 1954, having attended a performance of Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage*, noted that Mr Hindemith is no virtuoso conductor, but he does possess an extraordinary knack of making performers understand how his own music is supposed to go" He was awarded the Balzan Prize in 1962.

After a prolonged decline in his physical health (though he kept composing until almost the last), Hindemith died in Frankfurt from pancreatitis on 28 December 1963 at the age of 68.

Hindemith is among the most significant German composers of his time. His early works are in a late romantic idiom, and he later produced expressionist works, rather in the style of early Arnold Schoenberg, before developing a leaner, contrapuntally complex style in the 1920s. This style has been described as neoclassical but is very different from the works by Igor Stravinsky labelled with that term, owing more to the contrapuntal language of Johann Sebastian Bach and Max Reger than the classical clarity of Mozart.

The new style can be heard in the series of works called *Kammermusik* (Chamber Music) from 1922 to 1927. Each of these pieces is written for a different small instrumental ensemble, many of them very unusual. *Kammermusik* No. 6, for example, is a concerto for the viola d'amore, an instrument that has not been in wide use since the baroque period, but which Hindemith himself played. He continued to write for unusual groups throughout his life, producing a trio for viola, heckelphone and piano (1928), 7 trios for 3 trautoniums (1930), many sonatas listed above, and a concerto for trumpet, bassoon, and strings dating from 1949.

His finest works are those for string instruments and for orchestra. The British composer Frank Stiles, who was also a viola player has told me, and many others, that Hindemith's music for viola is excellent and well written and no one has written better for the instrument than Hindemith. The same can be said for his violin and cello music. The six string quartets are works of great quality and are not just essays in music but fine musical experiences. If we put his expertise in string instruments and the orchestra we have such masterworks as *Der Schwanendreher* of 1935 which is a viola concerto, although it is somewhat episodic

His most popular orchestral work is the *Symphonic Metamorphosis* on themes of Carl Maria von Weber of 1943 which is superbly orchestrated and an exciting work. The recording conducted by George Szell is remarkable. The final March is truly magnificent.. The *Symphony Mathis der Maler* is impressive and that dates from 1934.. The short *Concerto for Orchestra* of 1925 is an early example of his excellent writing for the orchestra. His writing for wind instruments is also good as shown in his *Symphony in B flat* for concert band.

He wrote choral and vocal music of character. The song cycle, *Das Marienleben* Op 27, completed in 1923, is a good example

He wrote books such as *The Craft of Musical composition* of 1937, *Exercises in two part writing* in 1939, *A Concentrated Course in Traditional harmony* of 1942-3, *Elementary Training for Musicians* 1945-6, *A composer's World* of 1953.

Other operas were *Cardillac* of 1926, revised in 1952, an opera for children, *Wir bauen eine Stadt* of 1930, *Mathis der Maler* completed in 1935, *The Harmony of the World* of 1957, *The Long Christmas Dinner* of 1960

He is a very fine composer although his work varies in quality and he does not get the recognition he deserves.



Hindemith (to the left) received the Sibelius Prize in 1955 from Antti Wihuri.

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