



Paul HINDEMITH

Overture to Amor and Psyché

Paul Hindemith (16 November 1895 – 28 December 1963) was a prolific German composer, violist, violinist, teacher and conductor. In the 1920s, he became a major advocate of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new objectivity) style of music. Hindemith was conscripted into the Imperial German Army in September 1917 and sent to join his regiment in Alsace in January 1918.[4] There he was assigned to play bass drum in the regiment band, and also formed a string quartet. In May 1918 he was deployed to the front in Flanders, where he served as a sentry; his diary shows him "surviving grenade attacks only by good luck", according to *New Grove Dictionary*. After the armistice he returned to Frankfurt and the Rebner Quartet. The Nazis' relationship to Hindemith's music was complicated. Some condemned his music as "degenerate" (largely based on his early, sexually charged operas such as *Sancta Susanna*). 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". The Nazis banned his music in October 1936 and he was subsequently included in the 1938 *Entartete Musik* (Degenerate Music) exhibition in Düsseldorf. He emigrated to Switzerland in 1938, partly because his wife was of partially Jewish ancestry. Hindemith became a U.S. citizen in 1946, but returned to Europe in 1953, living in Zürich and teaching at the university there until he retired from teaching in 1957. Toward the end of his life he began to conduct more, and made numerous recordings, mostly of his own music. Hindemith received the *Wihuri Sibelius Prize* in 1955. He was awarded the *Balzan Prize* in 1962 "for the wealth, extent and variety of his work, which is among the most valid in contemporary music, and which contains masterpieces of opera, symphonic and chamber music." Despite a prolonged decline in his physical health, Hindemith composed almost until his death. He died in Frankfurt from pancreatitis aged 68. He is buried in *Cimetière La Chiésaz*, La Chiésaz, Canton of Vaud, Switzerland. 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 the early Schoenberg, before developing a leaner, contrapuntally complex style in the 1920s. This style has been described as neoclassical, but is quite different from the works by Igor Stravinsky labeled with that term, owing more to the contrapuntal language of Johann Sebastian Bach and Max Reger than the Classical clarity of Mozart. Hindemith wrote *Gebrauchsmusik* (Music for Use)—compositions intended to have a social or political purpose and sometimes written to be played by amateurs. Most of Hindemith's music employs a unique system that is tonal but non-diatonic. Like most tonal music, it is centred on a tonic and modulates from one tonal centre to another, but it uses all 12 notes freely rather than relying on a scale picked as a subset of these notes. Hindemith even rewrote some of his music after developing this system. One of the key features of his system is that he ranks all musical intervals of the 12-tone equally tempered scale from the most consonant to the most dissonant. He classifies chords in six categories, on the basis of how dissonant they are, whether or not they contain a tritone, and whether or not they clearly suggest a root or tonal centre. Hindemith's philosophy also encompassed melody—he strove for melodies that do not clearly outline major or minor triads.

Written in 1942, in the depths of the Second World War and while the exiled composer lectured at Yale University, Hindemith composed the *Overture to Amor and Psyché*. Because of his compositional style, Hindemith's music is particularly suitable for dance. It was on a visit to the *Villa Farnesina* in Rome that the composer saw Raphael's frescoes on the story of Cupid (*Amor*) and *Psyché* and decided to write a ballet on the theme. He got no further than the Overture, perhaps intentionally so; Hindemith was falling out of love with dance and knew that the Overture was the one bit that wouldn't need to be choreographed. The story of Cupid and Psyche is one of beautiful attraction, love lost and love regained. There is no narrative element to Hindemith's neo-classical fast-slow-fast Overture. Rather, it depicts the beauty of Psyche while the luminosity of Raphael's frescoes shines through the score's transparency and detail.