



Paul HINDEMITH

Symphony "Mathis der Maler"

Paul Hindemith (16 November 1895 – 28 December 1963) was a prolific German composer, music theorist, teacher, violist and conductor. He founded the Amar Quartet in 1921, touring extensively in Europe. As a composer, he became a major advocate of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new objectivity) style of music in the 1920s, with compositions such as *Kammermusik*, including works with viola and viola d'amore as solo instruments in a neo-Bachian spirit. Other notable compositions include his song cycle *Das Marienleben* (1923), *Der Schwanendreher* for viola and orchestra (1935), the opera *Mathis der Maler* (1938), the *Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Carl Maria von Weber* (1943), and the oratorio *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, a requiem based on Walt Whitman's poem (1946). 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. 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 of instruments throughout his life, producing a trio for viola, heckelphone and piano (1928), 7 trios for 3 trautoniums (1930), a sonata for double bass and a concerto for trumpet, bassoon, and strings (both in 1949), for example. Around the 1930s, Hindemith began to write less for chamber groups, and more for large orchestral forces. In 1933–35, Hindemith wrote his opera *Mathis der Maler*, based on the life of the painter Matthias Grünewald. This opera is rarely staged, though a well-known production by the New York City Opera in 1995 was an exception (Holland 1995). It combines the neo-classicism of earlier works with folk song. As a preliminary stage to the composing of this opera, Hindemith wrote a purely instrumental symphony also called *Mathis der Maler*, which is one of his most frequently performed works. In the opera, some portions of the symphony appear as instrumental interludes, others were elaborated in vocal scenes.

Symphony "Mathis der Maler" (Matthias the Painter) is among the most famous orchestral works of German composer Paul Hindemith. Music from the symphony was incorporated into, or reworked for, Hindemith's opera *Mathis der Maler*, which concerns the painter Matthias Grünewald (or Neithardt). Hindemith composed the symphony in 1934, while plans for the opera were in their preliminary stages. The conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler asked him at that time for a new work to perform on an upcoming Berlin Philharmonic concert tour, and Hindemith decided to compose symphonic movements that could serve as instrumental interludes in the opera, or be drawn upon or elaborated into various scenes. Furtwängler and the Berlin Philharmonic gave the first performance on 12 March 1934. The first performance outside Germany was given by the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra in October 1934, conducted by Otto Klemperer. Other early performances include the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra in 1936, conducted by Daniel Sternberg. The symphony was well received at its first performances, but Furtwängler faced severe criticism from the Nazi government for performing the work, given that other Hindemith scores had been denounced by the party as "degenerate" and "Jewish connected." Moreover, the opera's plot, which turned on an artist's duty to pursue his vision irrespective of political considerations, was anathema to Nazi ideology. Hindemith completed the full opera by 1935 but, because of the political climate it could not be staged in Germany, and only in 1938 was it at last premiered, in Zürich, Switzerland.

The symphony is in three movements: 1. *Engelkonzert* (Angelic Concert), 2. *Grablegung* (Entombment) and, 3. *Versuchung des heiligen Antonius* (The Temptation of Saint Anthony). Each movement relates to a tableau painted by Grünewald for the Isenheim Altarpiece, an elaborate construction of panels behind panels, which presents different views as its various levels are unfolded. The Concert of Angels is seen when the outer wings of the altarpiece are opened; the Entombment remains always visible at the base of the altarpiece below the wings; and the Bosch-like Temptation of St. Anthony is uncovered when the inner wings are opened. Grünewald juxtaposed religious serenity with depictions of suffering grounded in the tensions that wracked 16th century Germany during the peasant uprising prompted by the Reformation. These contrasts are faithfully mirrored in Hindemith's score, which offers at once a portrait of a turbulent historical era and an urgent contemporary statement born amid political strife.