



Paul HINDEMITH

The Four Temperaments

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.

The Four Temperaments or *Theme and Four Variations* is an orchestral work and ballet by Paul Hindemith. Although it was originally conceived as a ballet for Léonide Massine, the score was ultimately completed as a commission for George Balanchine, who subsequently choreographed it as a neoclassical ballet based on the theory of the four temperaments. The music was premiered in Switzerland by the Stadtorchester Winterthur under the direction of Hermann Scherchen on March 10, 1943. However, Balanchine created the choreography a few years later. The ballet, *The Four Temperaments* was the first work Balanchine made for the Ballet Society, the forerunner of the New York City Ballet, and premiered on November 20, 1946, at the Central High School of Needle Trades, New York, during the Ballet Society's first performance. Though at the premiere, critics did not receive the ballet well, it was later acknowledged as a "masterpiece," and was revived by ballet companies worldwide.

Hindemith's score was borne from the success of his previous collaboration with Massine, *Nobilissima Visione*. Initially, they both conceived of a ballet based on the paintings of Pieter Brueghel the Elder, a score which the composer was projecting to being akin to a "Flemish peasant Persephone." Although Hindemith had composed a significant portion of the score according to Massine's scenario by 1940, he lost confidence in the choreographer after he devised an entirely new scenario for the work. On April 26, 1940, Hindemith wrote to his publisher, Willy Strecker of B. Schott's Söhne, that he had "broken off" his partnership with Massine, but that work on the score was continuing on schedule. Although definitive proof has not been established, it is generally believed that Hindemith's music from his aborted project ultimately became *The Four Temperaments*. On November 4, 1940, Hindemith wrote that the music was "quite good and worthy of a better cause." Hindemith's piece was ultimately used in *The Four Temperaments*, the first ballet George Balanchine choreographed for the Ballet Society. The Ballet Society, co-founded by Balanchine and Lincoln Kirstein, was a subscription-only company that would mainly perform new works, and the forerunner of New York City Ballet. One of the lead dancers in the original cast, Tanaquil Le Clercq, was seventeen when she created a lead role in this ballet, which was also her first professional solo role.