PAUL HINDEMITH

(1895-1963)

Wendy Warner, violoncello
Eileen Buck, piano

Sonata for Solo Cello, Op. 25, No. 3 (9:53)
1. Lebhaft, sehr markiert (1:48)
2. Mässig schnell, Gemächlich (1:28)
3. Langsam (3:47)
4. Lebhafte Viertel (:33)
5. Mässig schnell (2:09)

"A frog he went a-courting"
(Variations on an Old-English nursery tune) (6:16)
(Violoncello and Piano)

Sonata 1948 (22:42)
1. Pastorale (6:45)
2. Moderately Fast (6:41)
3. Passacaglia (9:10)

(Violoncello and Piano)

Capriccio, Op. 8, No. 1 (3:15)
(Violoncello and Piano)

Sonata, Op. 11, No. 3 (19:35)
1. Mässig schnell Viertel. Mit Kraft (9:04)
2. Langsam–sehr Lebhaft (10:26)

(Violoncello and Piano)

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Total Time: 62:02

Works for Violoncello by Paul Hindemith

by Stephen Hinton

Presented here are all of the principal solo works for violoncello, either unaccompanied or with piano accompaniment, by Paul Hindemith (1895-1963).[1] Evenly spread over his long career, the five compositions serve to illustrate an oeuvre celebrated (and sometimes maligned) for its stylistic range — and also for its encyclopedic coverage of musical genres. Hindemith wrote one or more solo sonatas for almost every instrument of the orchestra. The cello pieces also testify to the composer's immense personal commitment to solo chamber music, often composed with particular performers in mind, including himself.

Having begun his professional life in 1915 (at the age of twenty) as concert master at the Frankfurt Opera, in the early 1920s Hindemith switched from violin to viola as his preferred instrument, which he played in an extensive performing career as soloist and chamber musician. In 1923, a year after founding the Amar Quartet and in the middle of his meteoric rise as a composer, he relinquished his post as concert master. Composition and performance were always closely related for him. He knew the string family from the inside. Not surprisingly, his string chamber music invariably exhibits an extrovert element of performativity, not just in the works he wrote for himself and his friends. It is musician's music, written as much for the performer as for the listener; its very substance seems to emerge from the nature of the instrument for which it is written as well as from an intimate knowledge of that instrument's repertory.

As a mirror of the composer's evolution, the cello pieces document beginnings in the vanishing late-romantic world around the end of the First World War; there follows a rise to provocative prominence during the Weimar Republic's turbulent age of the New Objectivity; one of the pieces here reveals Hindemith's abiding penchant for anthropomorphic animal humor, otherwise and frequently expressed in a steady output of cartoon-like drawings (often featuring his wife, portrayed as a lion); musical works from the later period, after the mid-1930s, demonstrate a growing desire to pro-

[1] Excluded are the Three Easy Pieces for cello and piano, composed aboard the S.S. Hamburg en route to New York (1938) and the *Small Sonata* for cello and piano (1942), both of them pieces of Hausmusik that Hindemith played together with his wife, an amateur cellist. Other works with a solo cello are the *Four Pieces* for cello and bassoon (1942) and the *Six Very Easy Pieces* for bassoon and cello (1942); the *Ludus minor* (1944) for cello and clarinet, also written for and dedicated to Hindemith's wife; the *Kammermusik No. 3* for solo cello with chamber orchestra, Op. 36, No. 2 (1925), and the two cello concertos (1916 and 1940).

duce music with claims to the technical perfections and ethical responsibilities of putatively timeless European musical traditions. It is a career of remarkable contrasts — and of ceaseless productivity.

The earliest of the cello works, the *Capriccio*, Op.8, No.1, belongs to a group of three pieces (the other two are *"Phantasiestück"* and *"Scherzo")*, published in 1917 by Breitkopf und Härtel. As Hindemith's first published composition, Op. 8 is anomalous in that all subsequent works were adopted by his lifelong publisher Schott, with whom he had an unbroken working relationship for nearly half a century. Early performers of the work were Maurits Frank, with whom the composer would later play in the Amar Quartet, and his own brother Rudolf Hindemith, a successful professional cellist. Comparison with other works by Hindemith from this time suggests a protean facility to absorb a variety of influences, both German and French, as he sought to find his own voice. For all its traces of French wit, also to be found in other works from this time, the *Capriccio* echoes above all Hindemith's intense engagement with the music of Max Reger. Particularly "Regerian" are the frequent double shifts of meter and implied harmony in a context that is essentially diatonic and always richly contrapuntal. Something of Reger's atavisms can also be felt in the rococo-inflected motivic and accompanimental figures.

By the time he composed the *Sonata for Solo Cello,* Op. 25, No. 3 in 1922 for the Donaueschingen Chamber Music Festival, of which he was one of the organizers, Hindemith had acquired a

reputation bordering on infamy for his astonishing creative fluency. He himself promoted this impression. Of the *Solo Viola Sonata* Op. 25, No.1, composed for his own use, he boasted to his publishers that he "wrote the first and fifth movements in a buffet car between Frankfurt and Cologne and then went straight on to the platform and played the sonata." The *Cello Sonata's* creation was similarly swift. Hindemith claimed to have written four of its five movements in a single evening while engaging in a friendly competition with a number of other (hitherto unidentified) composers. According to one of the autographs (there are two in all), he took one just day to write the first two movements and another to write the final pair. There is no indication when he composed the middle movement. The paper and ink used suggest that he did indeed write the first four movements at one sitting, adding the fifth movement to round off the cycle a few days later.

In his analytical study of Hindemith's music, published in 1986, David Neumeyer singles out Op. 25, No.3 for detailed, extended scrutiny. This work, Neumeyer writes, may be "the closest [Hindemith] ever came... to a leap into Schoenberg's... atonal syntax." While Hindemith comes close to negating traditional tonality, many elements of his musical language prevent him from fully making that leap. Radicality in one dimension is usually counterbalanced by conservatism in another. The opening gesture of the first movement is at once traditional and shocking: a four-note arpeggio familiar from Bach's unaccompanied suites, beginning with the

two lower open strings. But the two upper notes do not complete a C-major chord. They are a half-step higher than expected, creating an acerbic bitonal clash between C and C#. That is the essence of Hindemith's early neo-Baroque style: familiar tonal gestures in a polytonal context. The first movement, like much of Hindemith's music around this time, amounts to a patchwork of variably diatonic elements. The form is the sum of its parts, no more. Cadences occur through repetition and diminution of individual gestures, rather than through tonal logic. Resting points are established more by rhetorical assertion and linear energy than by harmonic progression. The effect is one of improvisational spontaneity, as though the instrumentalist were generating the music in the very act of performance. "Suite" would better describe than "sonata" the five-movement design and non-developmental, often dance-like disposition; it would also point up the audible affinity to the solo cello suites of Bach, frequently and no doubt consciously echoed throughout this work, not just in the opening provocatively "defamiliarized" gesture.

The *Variations on an Old English Nursery Tune "A frog he went a-courting,"* while expressing Hindemith's penchant for light-hearted humor, bear witness to a composer quite different from the radical "New Objectivist" of the 1920s. Hindemith was now settled in the USA, having been appointed to the faculty at Yale's School of Music. His alienation from Germany during the Nazi period had ushered in a period of prolonged reflection, during which he felt

compelled to reassess his attitude toward tradition. Work on a number of theoretical projects were both symptom and cause of a heightened self-consciousness about compositional craft. Hindemith experienced a kind of mid-life crisis, leading him to reject some of his earlier youthful exuberance in favor of an approach to artistic creation at once more sober, more sophisticated, and more metaphysical. While he never lost sight of his commitment to performance, the brash performativity of his earlier music yielded to a more conservative, long-term concern about the condition of musical culture. If his earlier musical politics had tended toward the iconoclastic, he now showed positive respect for icons, even seeking to produce some himself. He also expended considerable energies revising a number of earlier works, such as the song cycle *Das Marienleben,* in order to bring them closer to his new theoretical and aesthetic ideals. His new attitude can be seen as a kind of musical environmentalism, which found eloquent expression in his Norton Lectures given at Harvard University in 1949-1950 and published as *A Composer's World.*

The Variations fulfilled an informal commission from his friend Gregor Piatigorsky, the renowned cellist, whom he had known during his years in Germany. In Hindemith's work catalogue the score is described as having been completed in "New Haven, 7 November 1941." Earlier in the same year Piatigorsky had given the premiere of Hindemith's 1940 *Cello Concerto.* Not only does Hindemith use the old nursery tune as the basis for 13 variations

(the first of the 13 sections, which introduces the melody, is itself more than just the statement of a theme). He prefaces the score with the thirteen verses of the nursery song. The text is indispensable in that each variation is a more or less direct musical response to it. Here are the thirteen verses, which correspond to the sections of the composition, also identified numerically in the score:

1. A frog he went a-courting, he did ride
   With a pistol and a sword hung by his side.

2. He rode up to little Mousie's door,
   He off his horse and he boarded the floor.

3. He took Miss Mousie upon his knee,
   Saying: Miss Mouse will you marry me?

4. O kind sir, I can't say that,
   You have to ask my Uncle Rat.

5. Uncle Rat went galloping to town,
   To buy his niece a wedding-gown.

6. Where will the wedding supper be?
   Away down yonder in the follow bush tree.

7. The first come in was the bumble-bee
   With his fiddle on his knee.

8. The next come in was an old fat goose,
   He began to fiddle and she got loose.

9. The next come in was a little flea,
   To dance a jig with the bumble-bee.

10. The next come in was the old tom cat,
    He says: I'll put a stop to that.

11. The goose she then flew up on the wall,
    And old tom cat put a stop to it all.

12. Gentleman Frog swam over the lake,
    And he got swallowed by a big black snake.

13. That is the end of one two three,
    The frog, the mouse and the bumble-bee.

The story of the frog's bizarrely aborted wedding to the mouse divides into five principal sections: Moderately fast (1-4); Allegro agitato (5-6); Jig (7-9); Allegro molto (10-12); and Moderately fast (13). As well as structuring the narrative through these distinctions

of tempo, Hindemith also employs a fair amount of explicit text painting, such as high register for the mouse, alternating "buzzing" eighth-note semitones for the bee, and a fugato for the dispatching of the wedding guests. Apart from some of his opera music, this is the furthest Hindemith ever went in the direction of representational program music. Absolute music, whose "laws" are also observed in this composition, was his stock-in-trade.

But the cultural values he attached to absolute music changed. In the 1920s, the brash neo-baroque motor rhythms functioned as an antidote to late-Romantic expressionism, a conscious retreat from solipsistic subjectivism. In the later music, the absolute expands to include a metaphysical concept closely associated to ancient theoretical ideals of *musica mundana* and *musica humana*. Hindemith's theoretical work seeks to find an ahistorical rationale for the musical relations embodied in his compositions. Harmonic fluctuation, the ebb and flow of harmonic degrees of consonance and dissonance, is something he consciously attempts to regulate in his music. (If he had done so before, it was more or less intuitively.) Having provided a radical example of "linear counterpoint," as the theorist Ernst Kurth called it, with his music of the 1920s, Hindemith's later compositions, from 1930 onward, reflected a growing interest in balanced harmonic frameworks within which to cast the fruits of an essentially polyphonic imagination. Even in his instrumental music, he is increasingly inspired by vocal models.

The *Sonata 1948,* also written for Piatigorsky, is a mature example of Hindemith's attempt to balance linear and horizontal elements in his music. Its outer movements – Pastorale and Passacaglia – have a tonal basis around E, which is asserted by contrast with more dissonant verticalities, rather than arrived at by tonal teleology. Melodic invention is similarly non-developmental. Hindemith's musical universe furnishes a stable, seemingly preordained context within which a finely honed, responsible craftsmanship is exercised. With the example of his music and in his own prose writings, he frequently invited a comparison with his famous German forebear, Johann Sebastian Bach.

With the *Sonata,* Op. 11 No. 3, the listener is returned to the musical universe in which Bach functioned both as an antidote to hyperexpressive Romanticism and as a respectable icon in need of updating for relevance in the modern world. This neo-baroque character is intensified with the revised version of the *Sonata,* completed in 1921 and published the following year. The original version, written in 1919, had been performed both by Maurits Frank and Hindemith's brother, Rudolf. Negative criticism at its premiere may have prompted the substantial revision. The central slow section at the beginning of the second movement, entitled *Im Schilf: Trauerzug* ("In the reeds: Funeral March"), is closely related to the last of the Op. 14 Whitman songs, also from 1919. Hindemith would later set the same poem again, this time in the original English, in his 1943 Requiem *"When lilacs last in the door-yard*

bloom'd." The *Cello Sonata* invokes specifically the mood of the line that Whitman had composed in memory of Abraham Lincoln:

Sing on, dearest brother, warble your reedy song;
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe

The plaintive opening figure of the movement in the piano closely echoes that of the song, continued with purely instrumental means by the cello, whose muted intensity at one point is marked *sehr gesangvoll* ("very mellifluous"), while the piano plays its repeated figures *in starr durchlaufender, eintöniger Bewegung* ("in rigidly uniform, monotonous motion"). The radical contrast between neo-baroque playfulness embodied in the outer sections of the work, especially the opening, and the melancholic espressivo of the central slow section is wholly characteristic of Hindemith's music of the early 1920s. As his career progressed, these two distinct sides of his musical voice came closer and closer together, culminating in the "melancholy of ability" with which he described Bach (and by implication himself) in 1950.

Stephen Hinton is chairman of the Department of Music at Stanford University. He has published extensively on 20th-century German composers, particularly on Kurt Weill and Paul Hindemith. His publications include the monograph ***The Idea of Gebrauchsmusik*** *(New York, 1989) and the edition of the* ***Symphony Mathis der Maler*** *and* ***The Philharmonic Concerto*** *for the collected edition of the works of Paul Hindemith.*

Wendy Warner is one of the most exciting players of the new generation of cello virtuosi. Her meteoric rise to prominence has included recent engagements with the Chicago Symphony, the Boston Symphony, the San Francisco Symphony, the Detroit Symphony, The Minnesota Orchestra, the Boston Pops Orchestra, the Dallas Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Ms. Warner has toured North America with the National Symphony, Mstislav Rostropovich conducting, and with the Moscow Virtuosi, Vladimir Spivakov conducting. In Europe, she has been guest soloist with the London Symphony, the Berlin Symphony, the French Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, the Iceland Symphony and L'Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse, and recently appeared with Anne-Sophie Mutter, performing the Brahms *Concerto for Violin and Cello* with L'Orchestre de Paris, Semyon Bychkov, conducting. In Asia, she has played with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, and has toured Japan as soloist with NHK and the Japan Philharmonic. Wendy Warner was first brought to the attention of the world stage when in 1990 she was awarded First Prize in the Fourth International Rostropovich Competition in Paris. A graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, Wendy Warner was a student of Mstislav Rostropovich from 1988 to 1994.

Eileen Buck has performed as recitalist, chamber musician and concerto soloist throughout the United States and Canada, winning a number of concerto competitions during the past decade. In 1996, Ms. Buck took first place in the Josef Hoffman Piano Competition. Eileen Buck received her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Curtis Institute of Music, and a Master of Music from the Mannes College of Music. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate at the City University of New York Graduate School, where she studies with Carl Schachter. Her teachers include Edward Aldwell, Adolph Baller, Tomoko Hagiwara, Vladimir and Eleanor Sokoloff, and Ki Sun Yun.

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