

# TEMPO

A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF MODERN MUSIC

Edited by Colin Mason

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## PAUL HINDEMITH (1895-1963)

In the later years of his life Paul Hindemith had become a somewhat neglected figure. Once ranked with Stravinsky and Bartók among the most stimulating experimenters of the 1920s, he later began to lose his hold on the public, and his influence on younger composers declined, especially after 1945, when serialism started to spread widely, leaving him very much isolated in his hostility to it.

Now that that issue no longer greatly agitates the musical world, it is becoming possible to assess more clearly the importance and individuality of his contribution to 20th-century music. An obvious comparison is with his compatriot of a generation earlier, Max Reger, who was similarly prolific, and in his early days was reckoned daring, but whose work later revealed an academic streak. In Hindemith one might call it rather an intellectual, rational and philosophical streak, not fatal but injurious to the spontaneous play of his musical imagination. As early as 1931 he wrote an oratorio *Das Unaufhörliche*, to a text by Gottfried Benn which mocks at human illusions of what is enduring, including (besides learning, science, religion and love) art. Hindemith's choice of such a subject seems to have been symptomatic of some scepticism on his own part about art, and although his innate creative musical genius could not be repressed, it was made to struggle for survival against the theoretical restraints that he insisted on imposing upon it.

Genius it was however, and it produced a handful of works which are among the undoubted masterpieces of 20th-century music, including one at least that we are sadly ignorant of in England, the early opera *Cardillac*. On a lower plane the many sonatas that he wrote for various orchestral instruments with piano are admirable examples of *Gebrauchsmusik*, not always notably rewarding for listeners but every one a delight to the performers. Having had its lean years during the composer's lifetime, his music stands a good chance now of making a recovery, and some of it will surely remain in the repertory for many years.

Earlier in the same month (December 1963) German music suffered another heavy loss with the death of Karl Amadeus Hartmann at the age of 58. One of the dominant post-war figures in German musical life, both as a composer and as an administrative musician, he was curiously little known in this country, except as the initiator of the celebrated *Musica Viva* concerts in Munich, which were the model for those courageously started some years ago at Liverpool and Glasgow but so soon dropped. As a composer he was less familiar here than his compatriots of the same generation—Blacher, Egk and Orff, of whom only the last is comparable stature. Hartmann was above all a symphonist, and produced eight works in this form. Since our musical life is founded largely on the symphony orchestra, it is surprising that we have not become better acquainted with these works, the powerful and intensely passionate expressiveness of which would certainly find a sympathetic response here.