

## **Listening Guide: Hindemith's Kammermusik #1**

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Composed between 1921 and 1928, the seven Kammermusiken by Paul Hindemith are a series of concert works, for an ensemble of 12 to 25 instruments with solo instruments: the piano, woodwind(s), brass, percussion. (n.2) the cello (n.3), the violin (4), the viola (5), the viola d'amore (6), the organ (7).

Back from the great scandals aroused by his Expressionist works, . . . Hindemith was making a radical change in those years. approaching the current of the New Objectivity ( *Neue Sachlichkeit* ) - a term coined for the figurative arts by Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, art critic and director of the Kunsthalle of Mannheim, who in 1925 had organized an exhibition (entitled precisely *Neue Sachlichkeit* ) with works by Georg Grosz , Otto Dix, Georg Scholz, Alexander Kanoldt, Georg Schrimpf, Wilhelm Schnarrenberg, Karl Hubbuch, Rudolf Schlichter, Hemrich Maria Davringhausen - .

The orientation of art towards an objective and linear representation of reality was reflected, in the musical field, in an overcoming of romantic aesthetics, in the return to an artisanal concept of composing, in the idea of "use music" ( *Gebrauchsmusik* ), in the recovery of a contrapuntal writing based on elementary melodic figurations and on a motoric and repetitive rhythm.

Exemplary of this new language were the *Kammermusiken* , compositions in which Hindemith succeeded in merging the Bachian model of contrapuntal writing, particularly the Brandenburg Concertos, with modern and extremely dynamic materials. Hindemith had chosen this generic title first of all as a tribute to the "Concerts of chamber music for the promotion of contemporary music" at the Donaueschingen Festival, founded in 1921 by Prince von Fürstenberg and directed by Hindemith until 1926. The highlight of the edition of 1922 was the *Kammermusik* n. 1 , which was directed on July 31 by Hermain Scherchen, and which caused quite a stir in the small village of the Black Forest.

The composer, then twenty-seven, had created violent, political music, charged with tension, in which the rhythmic component, with an almost mechanical character, assumed a more relevant role than harmony, the elaboration of themes, and developments. A music based on the concatenation of autonomous elements, devoid of any structural relationship between them, and strongly connoted: a crazy mix in which echoes of Stravinsky and Milhaud, rag-time and fox-trot, musics of Berlin cabarets, fragments are mixed of jazz and military music (during the I War Hindemith had also been part of a military orchestra). But also a mix of memories and personal experiences, which the composer told in the ironic self-portrait published in the *Neue Musikzeitung* , just in 1922: "as a violinist and violist, pianist or drummer, I plowed" in the following musical fields: chamber music of all kinds , cinema, coffee-concert, dance halls, operetta, jazz-band, military band. "Even the chosen workforce seems unorthodox, closer to the world of cabaret or circus than to that of the concert hall: a quartet of woodwinds (flute, clarinet, bassoon and trumpet), numerous percussions, piano (when it is not used in a rhythmic or percussive way, it outlines a constant background, rich in chromaticisms) and accordion, and a

quintet of strings that always play together and that Contrary to practice, they are used as rhythmic instruments.

The initial movement ( *Sehr schnell und wild* : very fast and wild), introduced by a theme screamed by flute, clarinet, accordion and cello, erect the xylophone, before ending with a spectacular glissando of all the instruments.

A quick motto of the whole ensemble introduces the second movement ( *Mässig Schnelle Halbe. Sehr streng im Rhythmus* : minimal fast enough, very strict rhythm), a march with a militarial tone (accentuated by the idiomatic use of trumpet and drum), but grotesque like a clown parade, and interspersed with some muffled sections entrusted to the string quartet.

«Quartett» is the title of the third movement ( *Sehr langsam und mit Ausdruck* : very slow and with expression), even if it is a trio for flute, clarinet and bassoon only punctuated by the tinkle of the Glockenspiel: movement together tender and sinister, and from the cantabile character, even if every melody is counterpointed by a counterpoint.

These first three movements together give the impression of preparing the ground for the great Finale ( *Lebhaft* : lively), emphatically titled 1921, which is the culmination of Kammermusik : a caustic, parodistic, always nervous collage of different materials, the quartet with a mute effect that creates an effect of turbulence, extended chromatic melodies and charges of tension, interrupted by violent gestures of drum, piano and accordion, which load the movement of tension until it explodes in a Furioso dominated by the virtuosic solo of the xylophone and from a foxtrot intoned by the trumpet - theme, indicated in the score as "Fuchstanz" (and attributed to the famous cabaret music composer Wilm Wilm), which Hindemith had learned to play in Frankfurt in the dance and music hall orchestras. The climax of the paroxysm is reached in the final section where all these materials are centrifuged in a pressing Grasp that culminates in the piercing and sarcastic scream of the siren.