

**Notes on the Program from the NY Philharmonic:  
Paul Hindemith's  
*Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes of Carl Maria von Weber***

Sixty or seventy years ago Paul Hindemith was regularly cited as one of the most significant and influential composers of the 20th century. In ensuing years his public stock fell sharply, but several of his compositions continue to hold a relatively persistent place in the active repertoire, including his *Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes of Carl Maria von Weber* (the English version of the title he preferred, rather than the often-seen title that uses the plural “Metamorphoses”), *Mathis der Maler* Symphony, the cantata *When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd* (after Walt Whitman's poem), and a number of chamber works. These last include a stream of challenging and terrifically “useful” solo sonatas (with piano accompaniment) for every instrument of the orchestra as well as chamber works for combinations of many of them — even such underserved instruments as English horn, heckelphone, trombone, alto horn, tuba, and double bass.

The years that followed World War I marked a free-for-all for creative artists, who were suddenly operating in a world that had overthrown central assumptions about society and humanity. Hindemith reveled in the variety of styles that swirled through the musical atmosphere, proving adept in a multitude of languages that, in retrospect, seem more innate to other composers: Puccini's melodic lyricism; Strauss's rich-blooded late-romanticism; Schreker's symbolist synthesis; Schoenberg's expressionism; Ravel's orientalism; Bartók's modality and rhythmic intricacy; and the inevitable allure of American jazz. Through all this imitation and experimentation Hindemith was developing his own angular and contrapuntal voice, which would emerge in its first maturity by the middle of the 1920s: a style based on strict harmonic rules of his own devising that he developed out of an idiosyncratic interpretation of musical acoustics. Hindemith's music, while sounding firmly tonal, often wends its way through musical hierarchies that are not exactly those of the time-honored tonic-dominant system.

During this time, Hindemith was also keeping busy as concertmaster of the Frankfurt Opera Orchestra (1915–23), and as the violist of the Amar Quartet (1921–29) and the Wolfstahl (later Goldberg)-Hindemith-Feuermann Trio (1929–34). He spoke openly about the challenges busy musicians faced if they were to avoid falling into stultifying routine, and he put his recommendations into practice by designing programs with constantly changing repertoire, even forming ensembles in which all members were tapped to perform on an instrument they did not already know how to play.

With the rise of the Third Reich, Hindemith became persona non grata in his homeland, thanks to his modernist proclivities and to the fact that his wife was Jewish. The Hindemiths left for Switzerland in 1937, and in 1940 proceeded on to the United States, where he took American citizenship and served as a professor at Yale University through 1953. Shortly after his arrival he was approached by the choreographer Leonid Massine, for whom he had previously composed the ballet *Nobilissima visione*, who proposed a new ballet set to arrangements of music written in the early 19th century by Carl Maria von Weber. Within two weeks Hindemith completed two movements and sent them to Massine. “The Weber ballet has gone down the drain,” Hindemith wrote to his wife, and continued:

I wrote two nice numbers for it, coloring the music lightly and making it a bit sharper.... It seems the music is too complicated for them and that they simply wanted an exact orchestral arrangement of the original Weber. I am not just an orchestrator and furthermore I had already told them what I was going to do. One really cannot work seriously with Massine.

Three years later he returned to the project, literally “metamorphosing” Weber’s originals into a virtuosic four-movement concert work, by general consensus the most colorful, debonair, and exuberant that ever issued from his pen. Reviewing the premiere in *The New York Times*, the critic Olin Downes described the *Symphonic Metamorphosis* as “diverting and delightful music — one of the most entertaining scores Hindemith has ever given us,” an opinion that has been seconded by listeners ever since.

Instrumentation: two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, tambourine, snare drum, tenor drum, tom-toms, bass drum, triangle, cymbals, small tam-tam, tubular bells, wood block, orchestra bells, and strings.

#### In Short

- Born: November 16, 1895, in Hanau, near Frankfurt, Germany
- Died: December 28, 1963, in Frankfurt
- Work composed: partly sketched in March 1940; composed in earnest in New Haven, Connecticut, in June and August 1943, completed on August 29 of that year
- World premiere: January 20, 1944, at Carnegie Hall, with Artur Rodzinski conducting the New York Philharmonic