

“DIESE MUSIK IST WEDER FÜR DEN KONZERTSAAL NOCH FÜR KÜNSTLER GESCHRIEBEN“:

ON HINDEMITH AND *HAUSMUSIK*.

Paul Hindemith was born in 1895, in the year that Grieg learned to know Arne Garborg's new cycle of poems called *Haugtussa*, which would soon form the basis for his op. 67. Hindemith was thus born in the late phases of romanticism, on the threshold of a new century in which he would play a prominent role as modernist composer.

To Hindemith, and many of his contemporary colleagues, the 19th-century world of Edvard Grieg seemed aesthetically old fashioned and musically passé. Negative views were often based on a general presumption that romantic composers were not sufficiently serious and that they belonged to the world of a bourgeois society that was thoroughly overdue. Adorno's critical notion of the slow movement of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony as “cinema music before its time” is but one well-known example of such an attitude. In his book *A Composer's World: Horizons and Limitations*, Hindemith states that Tchaikovsky's, Dvorak's, Grieg's and other composers' pieces “may release easily and pleasantly [...] images of feeling [...], but intellectually sometimes makes us ask: ‘Do these fellows really assume that we are so naïve as to take their jesting for serious creation?’”¹ Hindemith's self-confident utterance comes as part of a discussion on perceiving music intellectually and emotionally: In the romantic music to which he refers he does not always find what he regards as a fruitful combination of the emotional and intellectual potential that constitutes a true work of art. This view is typical of the middle-aged Hindemith's focus on the ethical side of music. At the same time his thoughts are strongly connected to the “anti-aesthetics aesthetics” of *Die neue Sachlichkeit*, of which the young Hindemith was such an eloquent spokesman.

¹ Hindemith, Paul: *A Composer's World: Horizons and Limitations* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 48.

Nevertheless, Hindemith's approach to the concept of musical art is rather diverse. While Grieg, in the preface to his *Slåtter* op. 72, writes about his ambitions of raising "these works of the people to an artistic level,"² Hindemith seems to be going the other way round in his desire to write art music for the people, for the amateur or the layman. The observation that "good music" is not delimited to the concert hall is a common trait between Grieg and Hindemith, although they do not share the same angle of incidence. To Grieg, the stage of the musical metropolis was one important medium in the process of promoting Norwegian music. In Hindemith's times, however, professional music life was often regarded with suspicion by the young composer generation, since it was seen as tending to promote shallow virtuosity and business interests rather than truthful art. Consequently, to save music from the concert hall by presenting it in quite diverse environments to a new public marked by a different attitude, was a common case for the composers advocating the ideals of *Gebrauchsmusik* in particular and *Gebrauchskunst* in general. For Hindemith, the creation of amateur music thus became a counterweight to what he saw as an unhealthy musical development in his time. In the wake of this recognition his approach to the heritage of music history appears to be far more varied than what his general attitude towards romantic composers may suggest.

A thorough concern for the musical amateur, as broadly demonstrated in *A Composer's World*, constitutes one of the basic traits in Hindemith's musical thought. And as far as the importance of amateur music-making is concerned, he does certainly *not* reject the musical times of Edvard Grieg: He rather idealises that period, since the amateur "reached the climax of his importance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."³

Grieg's pieces for piano and the societal setting in which they were created are well known. The German *Hausmusik* tradition of singing and playing in the middle-class home was known and cherished in Norway in Grieg's days and long before that. Hindemith started out his professional career as a resourceful performer of orchestral and chamber music and as a soloist on the violin, later in life on viola—not as a composer. Thanks to his socially ambitious father he grew up in the *Hausmusik*

² Edvard Grieg: *Slåtter. Norske Bauerntänze Opus 72*, Edition Peters Nr. 3097, preface.

³ Paul Hindemith: *A Composer's World*, p. 250.

tradition, and the kind of musical activities and ideals characterizing that tradition became a guiding star for him later on as a mature composer.

In 1926, Hindemith's encounter with the *Musikantengilde*, a branch of the *Jugendmusikbewegung* under the charismatic leadership of Fritz Jöde, caused a turning point in his professional engagement for the musical amateur. Through the enthusiasm of the *Musikantengilde* Hindemith saw nothing less than the salvation of modern music, since he believed that such a dynamic use of music might prevent the expanding gulf between new music and its audience. An innovative responsibility towards writing music that seriously took into account the basic premises for singing, playing, and musical communication was strengthened even more when he the year after, in 1927, received the position as a professor of composition at the Berlin Musikhochschule.

Undoubtedly the massive German amateur-music movement and its huge gatherings represented a drastic extension of *Hausmusik* privacy. Yet there are two common denominators which are of decisive importance for *Hausmusik* in its purest sense: First, the simple fact that the music is performed by amateurs, second, that this kind of playing or singing represents a deliberate demarcation towards official music life. A comprehensive set of cultural, political, and sociological factors influenced the progress of the German amateur movements, to which one also finds parallel developments in Norway and in the other Scandinavian countries. A cultivation of the German folk-song heritage and the playing of suitable instrumental music, preferably from the Baroque and the Renaissance, were seen both as an honest alternative to professional music life and above all as a means supporting "der Kampf gegen den Schlager". Hindemith was certainly no advocate of commercial entertainment music, and music from the Baroque, Renaissance and even from the Middle Ages was among his main interests. Still his strong affinity to the promotion of amateur musicianship rather seems to be rooted in what he saw as to main ways of singing and playing: *Vorspielen* and *Selbstspielen*. *Vorspielen* is the domain of the professional, Hindemith says, *Selbstspielen* is the realm of the amateur or the layperson.⁴ One may indeed question such a sharp division, but Hindemith's point is that a healthy music life contains two kinds of music making which should be regarded as being of equal

⁴ See Paul Hindemith: "Forderungen an den Laien", *Aufsätze, Vorträge, Reden* (Giselher Schubert, ed.) (Zürich/Mainz: Atlantis Musikbuch-Verlag, 1994), pp. 42-44-

value. Indirectly, he even suggests that *Selbstspielen* is more important than *Vorspielen*, since the listener, to whom professional performance is addressed, is of considerably less importance than the amateur musician.

Hindemith's attitude towards the listener in general is based on the conviction that listening to music is a *passive* condition, an opinion that was quite widespread in the 1920s. In earlier times the activities of the amateur dominated music life, Hindemith says in *A Composer's World*, and he continues: "He [the amateur] played in the orchestras together with the professional, he sang in the choirs, and for him all chamber music was written."⁵ As already mentioned, Hindemith states that the climax of amateur involvement was reached in the 18th and 19th centuries. In his opinion, the vast majority, counting 90% of participants in music in the 18th and 19th centuries, were amateurs, while the last 10% were equally shared between listeners and professional musicians. In the 20th century, however, the amateurs seem to have dwindled down to a meagre 1%, at the cost of a massive 95% of listeners.⁶ Hence, one conclusion from Hindemith's thought must be that Grieg and his composer colleagues of 19th century must have provided well-suited contemporary music for what should be regarded as a dynamic music life after all. Another conclusion that may be drawn from his deliberations is that in a healthful music life there is in fact no borderline between *Selbstspielen* and *Vorspielen*.

Hindemith regards passive music consumption as one of his art's worst enemies. He thus sees a decline of amateur-music activities in the 20th century as a symptom of the degeneration of music life as a whole, since this process seems to have encouraged the production of passive consumers. Consequently, he has an obligation to contribute by writing music for the target group that in his time is representing and further developing the *Hausmusik* tradition. In order to undertake an actively responsible role in society the amateur musician must not delimit him- or herself to the playing of old music. As in Grieg's times, the key lies in the creation of a repertory of contemporary music that is well suited for amateur performance. This conviction is the driving force behind Hindemith's *Spielmusik für Streichorchester, Flöten und Oboen* Opus 43/1, *Lieder für Singkreise* Opus. 43/2, and the instructive work *Schulwerk für Instrumental-Zusammenspiel* Opus. 44, which is part of the extensive series by Schott called *Das neue Werk—Gemeinschaftsmusik für Jugend*

⁵ Paul Hindemith: *A Composer's World*, p. 250.

⁶ Paul Hindemith: *A Composer's World*, p. 250.

und Haus. Hindemith was one of the editors of this series, together with Fritz Jöde of the *Jugendmusikbewegung* and the musicologist Hans Mersmann. *Gemeinschaft*—denoting a human community, as the alternative to a mechanical society—was one of the captivating words of the Weimar republic, and the title *Jugend und Haus* gives associations both towards amateur organisations for young people and *Hausmusik* activities.

Hindemith named his op. 45 *Sing und Spielmusiken für Liebhaber und Musikfreunde*, another title referring to domestic music traditions. One of the three pieces constituting this work is called *Frau Musica. Musik zum Singen und Spielen auf Instrumenten nach einem Text von Luther*. Martin Luther wrote his poem *Frau Musica* as a rhymed *Vorrede* to “every good song book”, originally to Johann Walter’s extensive work on the art of music called *Lob und Preis der löblichen Kunst Musica*, in 1538. *Frau Musica* as a name for the art of music stems from a medieval tradition connecting female personifications to the academic disciplines, to the so-called *septem artes liberales*.

Luther’s poem praises both the joys of music and its humanising powers. The opening of the modernized version that Hindemith used reads as follows:

Für allen Freuden auf Erden
kann niemand feiner werden,
denn die ich geb mit meinem Singen
und mit manchem süßen Klingen.
Hie kann nicht sein ein böser Mut,
wo da singen Gesellen gut;
hie bleibt kein Zorn,
Zank, Hass noch Neid,
weichen muss alles Herzeleid;
Geiz, Sorg und was sonst hart anleit,
fährt hin mit aller Traurigkeit.

This view of the profound powers of music also forms an important foundation for Hindemith’s thought in a broader sense. He opens the preface to the score with:

Diese Musik ist weder für den Konzertsaal noch für Künstler geschrieben. Sie will Leuten, die zu ihrem eigenen Vergnügen singen und musizieren oder die einem kleinen Kreise Gleichgesinnter vormusizieren wollen, interessanter und neuzeitlicher Übungsstoff sein.⁷

This explicit focus upon the delineation between official music life and musical activities that are shielded from the public epitomize the *Hausmusik* ideal. The word *vormusizieren* may be readily associated with *vorspielen*, but the important difference lies in Hindemith's clarifying that this should take place in a small circle of like-minded people, which means *not* on a concert-hall stage by a professional artist for a paying public. And when it comes to the actual performance of this music, Hindemith's intention is that everyone present shall participate:

Den Eingangs- und Schlusschor mögen die gesamten Anwesenden, denen man vor Beginn der Aufführung mit Hilfe der auf eine Wandtafel geschriebenen Noten die betreffenden Stellen einstudiert hat, mitsingen.

Hindemith would make use of this kind of joint singing also in works to come, and the combination in which *Vorspielen* and *Selbstspielen* merge into one and the same activity is typical for Hindemith's wish to restore the supposedly healthy music life of preceding centuries. And as already stated, the music itself should certainly not belong to earlier times. It should be contemporarily up-to-date, which also implies that the amateur must face the challenges and certainly reach out for the new music of a new century:

Dem Liebhaber werden hier einige Nüsse zu knacken gegeben [...] Trotzdem wird man von einer heute und für heutige Bedürfnisse geschriebene Musik nicht verlangen, dass sie von jedermann vom Blatt zu spielen ist.

This means that not only new music must reach out for the people: people must also reach for the music of their time.

⁷ Paul Hindemith: *Frau Musica. Musik zum Singen und Spielen auf Instrumenten nach einem Text von Luther Opus 45 Nr. 1* (Mainz: Schott, 1928), preface.

The amateur musicians reviving the basics of *Hausmusik* activity in Hindemith's immediate environments did never fulfil his visions of being a vehicle in a powerful regeneration of 20th-century musical life. Already in the early 1930s, Hindemith started expressing disappointment with modern amateurism, since the contemporary layperson, in addition to displaying a significant degree of musical arrogance, did not seem to take his or her task seriously enough.⁸

However, Hindemith did never lose his profound faith in active singing and playing as the main key to musical recognition. As years went by, he seemed to idealise the musical amateur even more. In *A Composer's World*, which was written in his period of American exile, seven years after World War II, he says: "It is not impossible that out of a tremendous movement of amateur community music a peace movement could spread over the world."⁹ Hindemith participated in World War I and he saw the horrors of World War II at a distance. His view on the potential of amateur music should not be seen as a symptom of naivety concerning questions of war and peace, but rather a token of his deep belief in the humanising powers of music. And it is the very key to these powers that Hindemith wishes to present through his engagement for a 20th-century revitalisation of the *Hausmusik* and amateur music that characterized the music life in the times of Edvard Grieg.

⁸ See Paul Hindemith: "Komposition und Kompositionsunterricht", "II. Die Musik der letzten Jahrzehnte", *Aufsätze, Vorträge, Reden*, pp. 54-63.

⁹ Paul Hindemith: *A Composer's World*, p. 254.