



John Bruce Yeh, clarinet

Clarinet Chamber Music

# HINDEMITH

Amelia Piano Trio

Easley Blackwood, piano

## CLARINET CHAMBER MUSIC BY HINDEMITH

John Bruce Yeh, clarinet

Easley Blackwood, piano

Amelia Piano Trio and friends

Paul Hindemith (1895–1963)

### **Sonata for Clarinet and Piano** (1939) (16:23)

- 1 I. Mässig bewegt (4:32)
- 2 II. Lebhaft (2:49)
- 3 III. Sehr langsam (6:15)
- 4 IV. Kleines Rondo, gemächlich (2:36)

### **Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet** Op. 30 (1923) (20:02)

- 5 I. Sehr lebhaft (2:10)
- 6 II. Ruhig (7:11)
- 7 III. Schneller Ländler (5:21)
- 8 IV. Arioso (3:05)
- 9 V. Sehr lebhaft (2:06)

### **Two Duets for Violin and Clarinet from the Music Day at Plön** (1932) (4:11)

- 10 1. Lebhaft (1:11)
- 11 2. Mässig bewegt (2:57)

### 12 **Variations for Clarinet and Strings from the Music Day at Plön** (1932) (3:54)

### **Quartet for Clarinet, Violin, Cello, and Piano** (1938) (28:12)

- 13 I. Mässig bewegt (7:09)
- 14 II. Sehr langsam (9:25)
- 15 III. Mässig bewegt (11:30)

Total Time: (73:11)

Easley Blackwood, piano 1–4

Anthea Kreston, violin 5–12

Maureen Nelson, violin 5–9

Baird Dodge, viola 5–9, 12

Jason Duckles, cello 5–9, 12

Amelia Piano Trio 13–15

Anthea Kreston, violin

Jason Duckles, cello

Jonathan Yates, piano

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**Clarinet Chamber Music by Hindemith**  
*notes by Stephen Heinemann*

Benjamin Disraeli once observed, “A man who is not a liberal at sixteen has no heart; a man who is not a conservative at sixty has no head.” By this reckoning, Paul Hindemith reached sixty at the age of twenty-eight. His first mature works had established him among the radical composers of the early modernist era, but an abrupt about-face in 1923 set him on a course of conservatism that, save for flirtations with electronic instruments in the late 1920s and with Anton Webern–influenced serialism thirty years later, would inform the rest of his prolific and distinguished career as composer, theorist, and pedagogue.

To Hindemith, the major triad was a fact of nature, clearly the harmonic manifestation of the overtone series, the physical acoustic property of the musical tone. (He had greater difficulty explaining the minor triad, finally regarding it as a “clouding” of the major.) By extension, tonality — the system of major and minor keys that had governed musical creation for three centuries — must likewise be a fact of nature. The composer most responsible for upending tonal practice, Arnold

Schoenberg, predicted in his *Theory of Harmony*, “As for laws [of tonality] established by custom, however — they will eventually be disestablished.” Hindemith, the antisestablishmentarian, held that mere custom could not account for the vast riches of tonality; unlike his contemporaries, he believed that its possibilities had not been exhausted. His solutions for extending musical syntax will sound, to the casual listener, more evocative of Schoenberg than of Brahms, but the crucial elements of historical practice — key centers, elaborate imitative counterpoint, traditional forms, instrumental combinations — remain primary, albeit modified to accomplish the particular intentions of individual pieces.

In the first volume of his theoretical treatise *The Craft of Musical Composition*, Hindemith asserted: “Music, as long as it exists, will always take its departure from the major triad and return to it. The musician cannot escape it any more than the painter his primary colors, or the architect his three dimensions. In composition, the triad . . . can never be avoided for more than a short time without completely confusing the listener.” Elsewhere, he compared tonality with perspective in painting, a parallel of systematic techniques

that seems more apt (the elemental tones perhaps being analogous to primary colors). Yet, while Hindemith admitted that a painter was free to obliterate perspective, he denied that a composer could avoid tonality, likening that to the attempt to escape gravity — a simile that was probably a good deal more compelling when it was made in 1952 than it is today. Many of his “scientific” observations have not borne up well to close scrutiny, yet they still constitute an eminently thoughtful basis for the effects of his art, which, like the music of virtually all composers, have proved stubbornly recalcitrant to systematic scientific investigation and explanation.

Hindemith did not view himself as a reactionary but as a pilot attempting to right a foundering ship. His aim was to write highly evolved tonal music that, for him, was intrinsically more advanced than atonal music at any point on an evolutionary scale. His aesthetic was derived from writings of the ancients St. Augustine and Boethius, who predated tonal practice by a millennium but in whose words Hindemith found particular resonance. Augustine’s *De musica* held that musical knowledge unified the human soul with the divine, while Boethius’s *De institu-*

*tione musica* asserted that “Music is a part of our human nature; it has the power either to improve or to debase our character” — both admonishments that Hindemith cherished deeply. He may not have been overtly religious in the manner of J.S. Bach, but he was certainly a spiritual person whose beliefs thoroughly informed his art, his craft, and his work ethic. He therefore worried about the effects of technology (“radio, Muzaks, and other relentlessly running music-faucets — a nonstop flow of faceless sound”) on people’s ability to listen attentively, blaming not so much those listeners as the “artists, managers, and agents catering maliciously to an ever-ready tendency towards the least resistance [with] the one goal, entertainment.”

Bach is the composer with whom Hindemith, with his thirst for craftsmanship and counterpoint, may be most profitably compared. The composer and critic Virgil Thomson perceived a connection to a more recent forebear, writing that Hindemith “is a neoclassicist like Brahms, with ears glued firmly to the past.” Like Bach and Brahms, Hindemith believed that anyone can have musical ideas, but it is composers, whether they are first-rate or sixth-rate, who learn how to preserve



provides much of the motivic material for this sonata-form movement; the fourths are particularly significant here and to the work as a whole.

#### II. *Lively*

A sharply profiled opening is joined to dotted (long-short) rhythms and counterpointed with a soft but expansive melody. The syncopation of the piano is picked up and developed by the clarinet.

#### III. *Very slowly*

The ascending fourths from the first movement are further developed here in a theme that soon reveals itself as a canon subject. The wistful closing theme is one of Hindemith's great melodic statements.

#### IV. *Little rondo, leisurely*

A simple theme unfolds with deceptive nonchalance and evolves into kaleidoscopic exchanges between the performers before a quiet and somewhat abrupt conclusion.

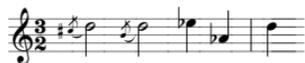
### **Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet**

Composed in July 1923 but not published until 1935, the Quintet is one of the works that Hindemith chose to revise in 1954, a

choice made partly in the wake of his theoretical research and partly because his newly full-time teaching commitment at the University of Zurich and the flourishing of his conducting activities precluded a focus on new compositions. Although some of the pieces subjected to his "rehabilitation" suffered a resultant loss of impact, the revised Quintet, performed here, is not among them. To a greater degree than even the Quartet, it is an intense and virtuosic piece, and it is novel for its use, in the third movement, of the E-flat clarinet, the notoriously challenging soprano instrument of which John Yeh is a master.

#### I. *Very lively*

Unusually visceral dissonance and agitation mark the brief, driving first theme.



Even the lyricism of a subordinate theme cannot affect the momentum in a movement where the composer does not develop his themes so much as insist on them. A held tone in the cello leads directly into

#### II. *Calm — lively — as at the beginning*

A quiet, expansive fugue gradually transforms into cascades of sound that give way to a clarinet cadenza. The clarinet elongates the opening subject over a veiled, plucked accompaniment, and subtle, intricate counterpoint resolves to a final major triad.

#### III. *Fast Ländler*

The Ländler, a waltz-like dance, is given a raucous, scherzo-like treatment. A contrasting middle section emphasizes the strings and provides a foil for the return of the original tempo.

#### IV. *Very calmly*

An overtly expressive violin tune is accompanied by gently percussive strings and interrupted by clarinet swells.

#### V. *Very lively, as in the first movement*

The unusual motivation of the first movement finally becomes clear: the fifth movement is its exact retrograde (that is, the same notes are presented in reverse order); the outer movements thus create a large musical palindrome. It is a testament to Hindemith's craftsmanship that the artifice is completely convincing, as neither movement suffers musically from the note-to-note dictates of the other.

### **Evening Concert from the Music Day at Plön**

These pieces were written for a music festival on June 20, 1932 in the small town of Plön, about 30 miles north of Hamburg in northern Germany. Eschewing the usual format that delivers a retrospective on a composer's masterworks, this festival instead commissioned Hindemith to write a series of short pieces for the occasion, most of them easy enough for the music students and amateur musicians of the town to perform and enjoy. All the works were composed a month before the festival, and Hindemith spent four days at a Plön boarding school rehearsing and discussing the pieces with student performers. The "Day of Music in Plön" consisted of *Morgenmusik* (morning music) for a brass ensemble to play from the village tower, the piece from this set that is most frequently performed; *Tafelmusik* (music to accompany the mid-day meal) for wind soloist and strings; a cantata (called "Advice to Youth") for children's chorus, soloists, and orchestra; and the *Abendkonzert* (evening concert) of six short pieces including an orchestral prelude and postlude, works for a recorder trio, a flute solo with strings, and, recorded here, the Two Duets for Violin and

Clarinet and Variations for Clarinet and Strings.

### **Evening Concert No. 3 Two Duets for Violin and Clarinet**

#### *Lively*

The clarinet plays a supporting role to a lolling violin melody. Hindemith effects subtle textural changes in the middle of the duet through the use of a few well-chosen violin double-stops.

#### *Moderately, with motion*

The instruments operate on an equal footing in this inventive miniature, constantly trading musical roles — literally so at the conclusion.

### **Evening Concert No. 4 Variations for Clarinet and Strings**

Theme: *Calmly, with motion*

Var. I: *At the same tempo*

Var. II: *Lively*

Var. III: *Slowly*

Var. IV: *At the beginning tempo*

A placid, memorable theme is followed by four variations. The first of these elab-

orates the theme via triplet rhythms; the second, by assertive string chords and a quickly flowing clarinet line; the third, by violin arpeggiations; and the fourth, by varied repetition or augmentation of the theme's phrases.

### **Quartet for Clarinet, Violin, Cello, and Piano**

Hindemith began composing the Quartet aboard the *S.S. Hamburg* en route from New York to Europe and completed it in Frankfurt in April of 1938. The Quartet was premiered two months later in the Swiss canton of Valais. The principal voices are those of the clarinet and violin, while the cello and piano tend to take supporting roles.

#### *I. Moderately, with motion*

A secondary theme (again featuring ascending fourths) exposed in the cello



achieves primacy through extensive development. A harmonically static section near the movement's end evokes Stravinsky before leading to a quiet coda.

#### *II. Very slowly*

A nostalgic and introspective clarinet theme is undercut by chromatic string harmonies and sparse piano sonorities; a declamatory center section recalls aspects of the first movement. The clarinet theme returns, but newly clothed in a pointillistic accompaniment.

#### *III. Moderately, with motion — lively — calmly, with motion — very lively*

A stately processional is expansively developed before giving way to a bouncy, tarantella-like section. The ensuing calm contrasts the ensemble of clarinet and strings with the solo piano, while the rapid conclusion is notable for its insistent polyrhythms.

Probably no consideration of Hindemith's work has been made that has not mentioned his creation of, and association with, the concept of *Gebrauchsmusik* — variously translated as “useful,” “workaday,” or “utility” music — and the present writing is no exception. In what was perhaps a bit of historical revisionism, he attempted to disown the term: “Quite obviously music for which no use can be found, that is to say, useless music, is not

entitled to public consideration anyway. . . . Up to this day it has been impossible to kill the silly term and the unscrupulous classification that goes with it.” Yet the word “useful” appears so frequently in his writings that the concept merits further consideration. Utilitarian musics unquestionably exist — film music, martial music, the dreaded background music — and one senses that Hindemith would have regarded all of these as useless, since they all place music at the periphery of one's attention and thus betray its power to connect the listener with the divine. To be truly “useful,” music must be at the forefront: *pace* Boethius, if it does not improve us, it debases us.

As the generic titles he favored would indicate, Hindemith wrote music that tends not to leave the listener with programmatic, non-musical images. Rather, one will perceive the interaction of purely musical elements as well as a decided impression of the composer himself — a man of impeccable honesty and sincerity, one who set his compositional aims high and met them: “In music,” he wrote, “as in all other human pursuits, rational knowledge is not a burden but a necessity, and it ought to be recognized as such by all. . . . A composer's horizon cannot

be far-reaching enough; his desire to know, to comprehend must incite, inspire, and drench every phase of his work. Storming the heavens with artistic wisdom and practical skill must be his least ambition." Once regarded among Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Béla Bartók in the pantheon of the greatest composers of his era, Hindemith has since been relegated to a subordinate position, replaced by Webern and Alban Berg. But the inevitable pendulum swing of taste now arcs in his direction, and his "conservative" music sounds in certain respects much more daring than many works being composed today. A recording such as this one is not a manifesto for a reconsideration of the composer's rightful place in history, but will be without doubt "useful," in Hindemith's sense of the word, in keeping undeniably wonderful music before the attentive listener — precisely where it belongs.

*Stephen Heinemann is Associate Professor of Music Theory, Composition, and Clarinet at Bradley University. His published writings have dealt with the compositions of Elliott Carter and Pierre Boulez.*

**T**he son of music-loving scientists in Los Angeles, **John Bruce Yeh** defines himself as a musical explorer. He pursued pre-medical studies at UCLA, where he won the Frank Sinatra Musical Performance Award and performed as Principal Clarinetist of the American Youth Symphony under Mehli Mehta. He entered the Juilliard School of Music in 1975 and also studied at Aspen, Marlboro, and Tanglewood. In 1977, when Yeh was 19, Sir Georg Solti invited him to join the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as solo Bass Clarinetist. Two years later, Yeh became Assistant Principal Clarinetist of the orchestra, a post in which he continues to serve. He has performed concertos by Stravinsky, Nielsen, and Elliott Carter with the Chicago Symphony and has soloed

with other orchestras in locations around the world including at the National Concert Hall in Taipei, Taiwan and in the Great Philharmonic Hall in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Yeh also appears as a guest artist on chamber music series and at music festivals around the world. His many solo and chamber music recordings have earned wide critical acclaim. Constantly striving to find new types of expression in music, Yeh organized the Chicago Pro Musica in 1979, which won a Grammy award as Best New Classical Artist in 1986. Recently, Yeh co-founded the visual-musical quartet, InVenTionS, together with clarinetist Teresa Reilly and mime artists T. Daniel and Laurie Willets. Please visit [www.inventions4.com](http://www.inventions4.com) for more information on this innovative ensemble.

#### **Also with John Bruce Yeh on Cedille Records**

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— *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

"John Bruce Yeh is a master of his instrument. . . . [This disc] deserves to join those of clarinet chamber music by Mozart, Weber, and Brahms in your collection." — *Fanfare*



**C**omposer, pianist, and musical theorist, **Easley Blackwood**'s career has been consistent only in its seeming contradictions and strong individuality.

Blackwood is Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago, where he taught for forty years (1958–1997). As a pianist, Easley Blackwood is cited in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians* "for his performances of modern works of transcendental difficulty." His solo piano recordings for Cedille Records have played to rave reviews:

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and ***Piano Music by Casella and Szymanowski***

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**H**ailed as "remarkable" by *Strings* and "exemplary" by *Strad*, the **Amelia Piano Trio** stands out as one of the

brightest young groups on the classical-music scene. Winners of the prestigious 2003 CMA/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming, the Amelias are advocates of new music and non-Western music. Pulitzer Prize-winning composer John Harbison wrote his first Piano Trio for the Amelias. Other commissions have included Augusta Read Thomas's *A Circle Around the Sun* and Adam Silverman's *Sturm*. At the invitation of Yo-Yo Ma, the Amelias participated in the Silk Road Project and toured Central Asia.



Photo: D. Blyth Design

The trio has performed extensively in North America and abroad, including France, Italy, the Caribbean, and Panama. They have recorded for Koch and the world music label Global Crossings. This is the Amelia Piano Trio's first recording for Cedille Records.

Heard on this CD are trio members Anthea Kreston, violin; Jason Duckles, cello; and Jonathan Yates, piano. (The Amelias' current pianist, Rieko Aizawa, joined the group in June 2003.) Also heard on this recording are the Amelias' friends and colleagues, Maureen Nelson, violin and Baird Dodge, viola.