



Paul HINDEMITH (1895-1963)

The Golden Hindemith

Duo for viola and cello (1934) [4:35]

Concert Piece for two alto saxophones* (1933) [8:46]

Sonata for solo viola, Op. 25/1 (1922) [15:53]

Sonata for alto saxophone and piano (1943) [11:11]

Trio for tenor saxophone, viola and piano, Op. 47 (1928) [14:54]

Henninge Landaas (viola); Vegard Landaas (saxophone); Rolf-Erik Nystrøm* (saxophone);
Elzbieta Nawrocka (piano); Bjørg Lewis (cello)

rec. 13 June 2004, Jar Church, 1 December 2006, 16 June 2007 RIS Church, 22 October 2005,
4 July 2007, Sofienberg Church, Oslo, Norway

LAWO CLASSICS LWC 1005 [55:25]

Titled 'The Golden Hindemith' this release from the Norwegian independent label Lawo Classics comprises chamber music for viola and saxophone. The curious title alludes to the name of Hindemith's favourite pub, the 'Golden Pike' close to the Neckar River in Heidelberg.

Hindemith's music certainly divides opinion. We are often told how significant he is as a composer in the annals of twentieth-century music whilst it is rare to see his greatly underrated works included on concert programmes. In U.K. concert halls his prolific output seems to be represented solely by his *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes of Carl Maria von Weber* (1943) and less frequently heard, the *Symphony: Mathis der Maler* (1934). The fiftieth anniversary of Hindemith's death fell in 2013 a landmark barely acknowledged by most concert programmers. Of the large number of concerts I attend each year it was in January *this year* (2014) that I heard my first ever Hindemith work on a concert programme. It was the *Concert Music for Strings and Brass*, Op. 50 (1930) and served as a highly refreshing addition to an otherwise conventional programme of the Austro/German masters.

In his chamber music Hindemith uses a wide variety of instrumental combinations. His works scored for small forces are often described as academic and in some ways this sentiment is understandable. Characteristically the chamber and instrumental music shuns programmatic content, technical virtuosity, serialism and atonality. Even inside a dissonant framework the music remains listenable and accessible; yet it can be plain in elaboration and for many lacks memorable substance. Hindemith was delighted to have assisted in the formation and running of the Donaueschingen festival, an annual event of contemporary music in Germany's Black Forest. It was during this time, predominantly in the 1920s and 1930s, that Hindemith wrote a great deal of chamber and instrumental music for the festival. Four of the

five works on this disc stem from that early period.

A virtuoso violist Hindemith gave a number of premieres career notably Walton's *Viola Concerto* at a Proms concert at the Queen's Hall, London. In view of his prowess it is not surprising that he wrote a considerable number of works featuring the viola. Opening the disc is the *Duo for Viola and Cello*. He composer himself introduced the piece alongside cellist Emanuel Feuermann in 1934 at the Columbia-Studio London. Violist Henninge Landaas and cellist Bjørg Lewis are highly assured players in this single movement score. Lasting just four and a half minutes it contains considerable rhythmic writing with concise but engaging themes. It's over in a flash.

Next the *Concert Piece for Two Alto Saxophones* is a splendid work for this uncommon combination. The premiere of this three movement duet had to wait until 1960 when given by Sigurd Raschèr and Carina Raschèr at the Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York. Saxophonists Vegard Landaas and Rolf-Erik Nystrøm bring out its splendid timbres and blend magnificently. The weighty and dance-like *Finale: Lebhaft* proves especially effective.

The *Sonata for solo viola*, Op. 25/1 was composed in 1922 and dedicated to 'Ladislav Černý' a celebrated Czech viola soloist and teacher. The composer was soloist at the premiere in 1922 at Cologne and had created a work requiring uncommon intensity and virtuosity. Cast in five movements this disc has the first and second movements linked as one track. I was struck by the long flowing line of the third movement - *Sehr Langsam* - contemplative and rather bleak. Notable is the extremely brief fourth movement with the explicit marking *Rasendes Zeitmaß. Wild. Tonschönheit ist Nebensache (Raging tempo. The Wild. Beauty of tone is of secondary importance)* - a raging outburst, agitated and frenetic. Compelling violist Henninge Landaas plays this solo *Sonata* confidently investing his artistry with considerable vitality.

Hindemith wrote his *Sonata for alto saxophone (or natural horn/alto horn) and piano* in four movements in 1943. When living in the USA he found that the natural horn was not commonly used so in the *Sonata* he permitted a tenor saxophone instead. As an epigraph to the final movement Hindemith includes a short poem titled '*The Posthorn (Dialogue)*' intended to be recited by the players, a verse in turn, before the final movement. Disappointingly the players here have chosen not to recite the poem. Vegard Landaas and Elzbieta Nawrocka are well matched and in their playing convey a sense of spontaneity. Especially appealing is the carefree and upbeat second movement marked *Lebhaft*. Here the writing gradually gains in weight and intensity.

The final work is the *Trio for piano, viola and tenor saxophone*, Op. 47, a two movement work from 1928. It's an example of the maturing Hindemith finding his individual voice. This was premiered the same year at Wiesbaden in its original instrumentation by Paul Hindemith (viola), Theodor Dieckmann (heckelphone) and Emma Lübbecke-Job (piano). When visiting Wilhelm Heckel's woodwind shop Hindemith had become fascinated with the heckelphone, a bass oboe-like instrument developed in 1904 by Heckel of Biebrich. After writing this *Piano Trio* which includes the heckelphone in its scoring Hindemith realised it was far more practical to substitute it with a tenor saxophone which is what is used here. The opening movement is in three parts with the *Arioso: Sehr langsam* carrying a strong sense of wonder

and something close to disorientation. From 5:53 the music of the *Duet: Lebhaft* becomes increasingly agitated with an even stronger feeling of disorientation. Titled *Potpourri*, the second movement, divided into four sections, has an overall vibrant character that sports a gypsy dance overtones. The warm playing of the trio is splendidly characterised and delivers an abundance of colour.

The CD booklet includes passages from a stage play about Paul Hindemith entitled '*Tre takter takk!*' written by John Nyutstumo. It was commissioned by the musicians on this release and specially adapted to the music on the CD. I greatly enjoy Nyutstumo's narrative but I was left wanting some more information on the five chamber scores. Recorded in 2004-07 in three Oslo locations the engineers have provided consistently impressive sound quality vividly clear and well balanced. It's a shame that the available space wasn't used to accommodate at least one other work.

This is a marvellous disc, impressively played and recorded and containing a fascinating selection of Hindemith's greatly under-appreciated chamber music.

Michael Cookson