

**Parody and the E-flat Clarinet in Hindemith's  
*Quintette für Klarinette und Streichquartett, op. 30***

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Composed in 1923 for the International Society for New Music (IGNM)<sup>1</sup> festival in Salzburg, Hindemith's *Quintette für Klarinette und Streichquartett*, op. 30 remains relatively unknown in both Hindemith's *oeuvre* and in clarinet repertoire. The work itself has several notable features; the fifth movement is an exact retrograde of the first, the *fugato* second movement and homophonic fourth movement provide contrast and balance, and the third movement is a pastiche of Ländler tunes, for which the clarinetist must switch from B-flat to E-flat clarinet. In addition, the quintet exists in two editions: Hindemith's revised version published in 1954 and the original version from the 1923 premiere (available in print since 1986).

Despite these unusual features, scholars have neglected the quintet. Only three pieces of scholarship on the quintet can be considered truly significant: George Townsend's analysis of the quintet's structure and tonality;<sup>2</sup> Pamela Weston's account of the work's genesis and premiere at the 1923 IGNM festival;<sup>3</sup> and Peter Cahn's article, in which he compares the quintet's original 1923 edition with the revised edition of 1954.<sup>4</sup> Descriptions of the quintet in CD liner notes, performance reviews, and various chamber music reference guides make up the rest of the literature devoted to the work. At most,

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<sup>1</sup>*Internationalen Gesellschaft für Neue Musik*

<sup>2</sup>George Townsend, "A stylistic and performance analysis of the clarinet music of Paul Hindemith" (Ed. D thesis, University of Illinois, 1967).

<sup>3</sup>Pamela Weston, "Werner Reinhart: Philanthropist Extraordinaire," *The Clarinet* 28 (June 2001); *Yesterday's Clarinetists: A Sequel* (Yorkshire: Emerson Edition Ltd., 2002).

<sup>4</sup>Peter Cahn, "Hindemiths Klarinettenquintett op. 30 und seine beiden Fassungen," in *Hindemith-Jahrbuch 1987/XVI* (Mainz: Schott, 1991).

these sources provide a brief description of the work and its premiere, and mention the existence of the two editions.

The little research that does exist has tended to focus on the quintet's neoclassic characteristics, such as its use of retrograde and the symmetry of the movements. For example, one critic calls the quintet "Hindemith at his most neo-classical,"<sup>5</sup> while another describes it as "boisterous *Spielmusik*" that "affects a conscious objectivity;"<sup>6</sup> "*Spielmusik*" and "objectivity" being terms commonly associated with neoclassicism. This emphasis on the quintet's neoclassical characteristics ignores what I believe is the most important and striking feature of the work: the use of the E-flat clarinet in the third movement.<sup>7</sup> This presentation will explore how the inclusion of the E-flat clarinet, upon which Hindemith was insistent, functions in many ways and on many different levels in both the movement and in the work as a whole.

First of all, both the E-flat clarinet and the Ländler tunes of the third movement serve as a (tongue-in-cheek) musical tribute to Austria; site of the IGNM festival. As Cahn notes, "the predominantly Austrian-sounding tone of the themes is, of course, directed at the location of the festival, at Salzburg."<sup>8</sup> A Ländler was an appropriate choice for a tribute to Austria, being a "dance basic to the folk music of Austria, South Germany, and the Alpine regions."<sup>9</sup> However, the E-flat clarinet also had strong ties to

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<sup>5</sup>Stephen R. Max, "Guide to Records: Hindemith-"Clarinet Quartet, Quintet, Sonata," *American Record Guide* 60 (March/April 1997): 155.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Hindemith, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, liner notes by Harry Halbreich, Musical Heritage Society ORH-289, 1970, LP.

<sup>7</sup>This was the first work to be scored for E-flat clarinet and strings alone.

<sup>8</sup>Peter Cahn and Ann-Katrin Heimer, eds., *Bläserkammermusik I*, vol. 5 of *Paul Hindemith, Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Giselher Schubert (Mainz: Schott, 2001), xv.

<sup>9</sup>Gammond, Peter and Andrew Lamb, "Waltz," in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*,

Austria, due to the common use of sopranino clarinets in Austrian dance orchestras throughout the nineteenth century. The “fathers” of the Viennese waltz, Joseph Lanner (1801-1843) and Johann Strauss I (1804-1849) both used small clarinets quite frequently; scoring for clarinets pitched in D, E-flat, F, and even G. Johann Strauss II (1825-1899) included E-flat and D clarinets in almost half of his compositions.<sup>10</sup>

Small clarinets also had a strong presence in Austrian folk ensembles. One notable example from the late nineteenth century is the Schrammel Quartet, which consisted of two violins, bass guitar, and a G clarinet, played by Georg Dänzer (1848-1893). This famous ensemble, considered “emblematic of Viennese culture,”<sup>11</sup> has even spawned several modern-day “Schrammel Quartets” that have retained the G clarinet.

Small clarinets were also present in another type of folk music from the Austro-Hungarian soundscape: the bands of the Roma (gypsy) people. Scholars have alluded to the use of sopranino clarinets in these bands<sup>12</sup>, and Cahn describes Hindemith’s Ländler movement as a “colorful mixture of echoes of the Vienna waltz and Hungarian folk music.”<sup>13</sup>

Although the inclusion of the E-flat clarinet may have served to honor Austria, ultimately I believe its primary function was to create absurdity and humor, linking the

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<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e7260> (accessed January 10, 2010).

<sup>10</sup>Wiener Institut für Strauss-Forschung, *Strauss-Elementar-Verzeichnis: (SEV): thematisch-bibliographischer Katalog der Werke von Johann Strauss (Sohn)* (Tutzing: H. Schneider, 1990).

<sup>11</sup>Camille Crittenden, *Johann Strauss and Vienna: Operetta and the Politics of Popular Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20.

<sup>12</sup>Oskar Kroll, *The Clarinet*, trans. Hilda Morris (New York: Taplinger Pub. Co., 1968), 97; Basil Tschaikow, “The high clarinets,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Clarinet*, ed. Colin Lawson (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 53.

<sup>13</sup>Cahn, “Hindemiths Klarinettenquintett,” 144.

quintet to Hindemith's parody works of the early 1920s, such as *Kammermusik No. 1* (1922) and "*Minimax*" *Repertorium für Militärorchester für Streichquartett* (1923). The simple act of scoring the E-flat clarinet creates a parody of "serious" chamber music in several different ways. On the most basic level, Hindemith relies on the E-flat's reputation, codified in orchestration books and treatises as a shrill, sarcastic instrument used for caricature, to provide shock value. On a deeper level, the combination of two different musical ideas, the E-flat clarinet and a string quartet, exaggerates the parody aspect. By scoring two wholly unrelated things, a shrill, comical wind instrument and an ensemble whose repertoire is "widely regarded as the supreme form of chamber music,"<sup>14</sup> Hindemith both undermines the conventions of chamber music and creates what Giselher Schubert calls "ironical and amusing effects...from the musical situation."<sup>15</sup>

The E-flat clarinet's role as primarily a military band instrument widens the divide between the E-flat and string quartet even further. Small clarinets have a history of widespread and long use in military bands, particularly in Prussia and Austria, and it is this martial association that makes the instrument's pairing with a string quartet even more ludicrous.<sup>16</sup> At the quintet's premiere, one critic noticed the unusual combination and commented on "the small clarinet which we know chiefly in military bands... the

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<sup>14</sup> Cliff Eisen, et al, "String quartet," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40899> (accessed January 11, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Hindemith, *Quintett für Klarinette und Streichquartett, op. 30 (Erstfassung), Repertorium für Militärmusik "Minimax," Ouvertüre zum "Fliegenden Holländer,"* Peter Klaus Löffler, clarinet, notes by Giselher Schubert, Wergo WER 6197-2, 1991, digital disc.

<sup>16</sup> David Whitwell, *The History and Literature of the Wind Band and Wind Ensemble*, vol. 5, *The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Wind Band and Wind Ensemble in Western Europe* (Northridge, CA: Winds, 1984).

uncompromising tone is hard to bear in association with a string quartet.”<sup>17</sup> In addition to the ironic musical situation, another layer of significance is present; for the disconnect between two different musical ideas may reflect, or be a reaction to, Hindemith’s own experiences as a drummer in a military band during the First World War.

The combination of the two musical tropes found in the quintet (military music versus chamber music) creates an absurd situation that seems to almost border on Dadaism, the post-war musical movement, characterized by its “juxtaposition of opposites,”<sup>18</sup> that “celebrated nonsense and frivolity as a reaction against the seriousness of war.”<sup>19</sup> This juxtaposition was present during Hindemith’s military service as he juggled both musical and martial activities; composing and playing in a string quartet with his fellow soldiers while at the same time narrowly escaping gunfire and bombing raids at the front. Indeed, Hindemith’s wartime letters echoed these contrasts, as he mentioned playing “only [string] quartets and brass band music,”<sup>20</sup> and even hinted at Dada-like sentiment; “The war is sad enough, and the best thing one can do is set up a “music-hall of humor” against these present times.”<sup>21</sup> When discussing Hindemith’s parody and scandalous works from the early 1920s, Glenn Watkins describes them as

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<sup>17</sup>Edwin Evans, “Donaueschingen and Salzburg Festivals,” *The Musical Times* 64 (September 1, 1923): 634.

<sup>18</sup>Matthis, 143.

<sup>19</sup>Olivia Matthis, “Varèse and Dada,” in *Music and Modern Art*, ed. James Leggio (New York: Routledge, 2002), 130.

<sup>20</sup>Geoffrey Skelton, ed. and trans., *Selected Letters of Paul Hindemith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 17.

<sup>21</sup>Skelton, *Selected Letters*, 10.

Hindemith's "post-war Dadaist escape."<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the quintet is part of that escape, and part of his "music-hall of humor."

By exploring the role of the E-flat in Hindemith's Clarinet Quintet, the work is shown to be much more than simply a chamber work from Hindemith's neoclassic period. The inclusion of the E-flat clarinet causes the quintet to have different meanings on many levels: such as a tribute to Austria and a parody that undermines traditional chamber music conventions. The strong military connotations of the instrument may even tap into post-war, Dada-esque sentiments. By gaining a new understanding of how it fits in with Hindemith's other compositions, it is my hope that the quintet will rise in prominence both in scholarship and within the clarinet canon.

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<sup>22</sup>Glenn Watkins, *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 404.