

Produced by Andrew Kazdin			
HINDEMITH: DAS MARIENLEBEN		ROXOLANA ROSLAK, Soprano	GLENN GOULD, Piano
Side 1	Side 2	Side 3	Side 4
1. Geburt Maria	5. Argwohn Josephs	9. Von der Hochzeit zu Kana	13. Vom Tode Maria I
2. Die Darstellung Maria im Tempel	6. Verkündigung über den Hirten	10. Vor der Passion	14. Vom Tode Maria II (Thema mit Variationen)
3. Maria Verkündigung	7. Geburt Christi	11. Pieta	15. Vom Tode Maria III
4. Maria Heimsuchung	8. Rast auf der Flucht in Ägypten	12. Stillung Maria mit dem Äußerstenden	This selection is BMI.

A TALE OF TWO MARIENLEBENS

Das *Marienleben* is the pivotal work in Hindemith's development as a composer. Its two realizations—published a quarter century apart—succinctly define his evolution, both as musician and as thinker, and, in the process, set something very like a historical precedent. Certainly I can recall no comparable instance in which a great master, taking as his source the most influential and substantial of his youthful efforts, re-creates it according to the technical and idiomatic lights of his maturity.

Facile comparisons come to mind, of course: Alban Berg twelve-tone re-writes of his early song "Schluss mit den Augen beide"; for example. But, all considerations of scale aside, the distinctions between the two *Marienleben*s are far subtler than the simplistic tonal-atonal rivalries of Berg's settings. A more accurate, if inevitably imaginary, approximation of what Hindemith has wrought could perhaps be obtained through a comparison with composers whose styles metamorphosed in a similar, relentlessly organic manner—Bach, say or in more recent times, Richard Strauss. As with Hindemith, both masters pursued a superficially uneventful evolution and shielded their listeners from technical innovations of a revolutionary order but, for the sake of our comparison, Strauss provides the better example. For Bach, by and large, proceeded from simplicity to complexity; his early distastefully redundant, tocadde fugues, for example, re-written in the convolutedly chromatic manner of the *Art of Fugue*, would not serve our comparative case at all. But Strauss, like Hindemith, moved in the opposite direction—complexity to simplicity—and via a route which gradually replaced darning gestures with confident routines. If, then, Richard Strauss had re-written "All Erläuterungen" in the style of the *Oboe Concerto*, one would have a reasonable comparison to stand against Hindemith's undertaking with the *Marienleben*.

For the relationship of the two *Marienleben*s is emphatically not that of first to second draft. Nevertheless, standing the vast amount of reprocessed material, the reproduction itself of one song ("Stillung Maria mit dem Äußerstenden") and the inclusion of another ("Pieta") which boasts such minor alterations as make no matter, the two versions proceed from very different compositional concepts. The first *Marienleben* derives from Hindemith's youth, from a time when change was in the air, tonality in the process of an expansion which threatened its disintegration, the then, when the then twenty-seven-year-old Hindemith spearheaded a contrapuntal revival intended to buttress the about-to-be-undated foundations of tonal harmony. It is a work of infectious spontaneity of divine intuition, in which connections are left to exist long before an exegesis can confirm their presence. The second *Marienleben* is the summation of Hindemith's life-long quest for systematic coherence—a product of intense cerebration, thorough

calculation, and thoughtful consideration for the vocal and instrumental personnel concerned.

On the occasion of its publication in 1948, the composer appended a supplementary essay in which he expressed his not unexpected preference for the later version. The essay is brilliantly written, lightly argued—indeed, one of the finest of Hindemith's not-inconsiderable literary efforts—and, in addition to the inclusion of some shrewd comments on the then-current musical scene (they read as though written yesterday) and a vivid evocation of the compositional climate of the 1920s in which the first *Marienleben* was conceived, offers some remarkable musical and theological insights. More to the point, Hindemith advertises the (to his mind) inherent superiority of the second version by delineating the following major themes:

- (1) that the cycle, in its original form, was ungratefully conceived for the voice;
- (2) that it lacked dramatic coherence;
- (3) that the new version incorporates motivic and harmonic relationships worthy of its complex theological subject; he does not say in so many words, that the original *Marienleben* lacked these latter qualities but suggests, rather, that "although in the *Marienleben*, I had given the best that was in me, this best, despite all my good intentions, was not good enough to be laid aside once and for all as successfully completed."

With (1) I cannot disagree—not, I am sure would anyone who attempts to sing the original version. The vocal line is conceived with something like Beethovenian indifference, subjected to non-stop, instrumentalistic activity and, in the more conspicuously contrapuntal segments, the soloist is rarely allowed up for air. And yet, it is precisely this chamber-musical intimacy which is, to me, one of the glories of the original version. The soprano part is not relieved by gratuitous piano solos, fortified by doublings, or reassured by entry cues, and, as a result, the vocalist is enabled to convey an urgency wholly in keeping with the more declamatory segments of the text, in particular, and to cultivate a degree of abstraction unparalleled in lieder literature—on approach, in my view, which is singularly appropriate to this particular subject.

The second *Marienleben* risks no such ambiguities. The piano part is not only less interestingly conceived, it is also, curiously for less idiomatic. (Hindemith acquired some bad piano-texture habits in the 1940s; his *Concerto* (1945) contains more embarrassingly redundant octave couplings than any comparable work. This side of Max Regers' F minor!) The very string-like, textures of the first version have given way to complicated chord-clusters and predictable cue-oriented interludes. (Examples 1 and 2)

Example 1 (Original Version)



Engineers: Keni Warder, Frank Dean Denenholz Cover Design: Henrietta Coudack, cover photo: Don Hunstein

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HINDEMITH: DAS MARIENLEBEN

ROXOLANA ROSLAK, GLENN GOULD

(Original Version)

M2 34597



Soprano

Piano



Example 2 (Revised Version)



Example 3 (Original Version)



Example 4 (Revised Version)



Example 5 (Revised Version)

As regards Hindemith's second major point—that the original version "was essentially a series of songs held together by the text and the story unfolded in it, but otherwise not following any compositional plan of the whole"—the composer points out that the cycle is divided into four "clearly separate groups" (this is not, however, an innovation—the original version was as well), that the first of the groups (songs 1-4) deals with the "personal experience" of the Virgin, the second (songs 5-9) contains "the more dramatic songs...in which a considerable number of persons, actions, scenes, and circumstances are shown," the third (songs 10-12) offers "Mary as sufferer," and that the fourth (songs 13-15) is "an episode in which persons and actions no longer play any role."

Hindemith, indeed, supplies a graph detailing the expressive and dramatic urgency levels attributed in the various segments, and here, to be sure, there is one major structural change: Song No. 9—"Von der Hochzeit zu Kana"—is now conceived as the culmination of group 2 rather than, in the original version, the prelude to group 3. Further, Hindemith claims that it is "the dynamic climax of the whole cycle...the song which in

volume of sonority in the number of harmonies employed, in variety and power of tonality and in compelling structural simplicity of form represents the highest degree of physical effort in the presentation of the whole work...the curve of dynamic expenditure rises from the beginning of the cycle to the 'Hochzeit,' and falls from there to the end."

In this emphasis, Hindemith is, quite properly more faithful to Rilke than to conventional interpretations of the Gospel according to St. John, the importance he accords this song in the latter setting, however, puts him firmly in the camp of those exegetes who decode from the Gena story the intrusion into history of the Messianic Christ. In Rilke's phrase, Christ's eschatological reality "Mime hour is not yet come," into a merger of the symbols of water, wine and blood, and Hindemith's bottom dramatic urgency levels attributed in the various segments, and here, to be sure, there is one major structural change: Song No. 9—"Von der Hochzeit zu Kana"—is now conceived as the culmination of group 2 rather than, in the original version, the prelude to group 3. Further, Hindemith claims that it is "the dynamic climax of the whole cycle...the song which in

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Paul Hindemith 1895–1963

Das Marienleben op. 27

for Soprano and Piano (1922/23 version)

Text: Rainer Maria Rilke

Album 1

PART 1

1	Geburt Mariä	3:47
2	Die Darstellung Mariä im Tempel	10:12
3	Mariä Verkündigung	4:37
4	Mariä Heimsuchung	3:44
5	Argwohn Josephs	1:45
6	Verkündigung über die Hirten	4:36
7	Geburt Christi	4:37
8	Rast auf der Flucht nach Ägypten	4:21

Total Time 37:40

Album 2

PART 2

1	Vor der Hochzeit zu Kana	4:31
2	Vor der Passion	7:22
3	Pietà	4:06
4	Stillung Mariä mit dem Auferstandenen	3:10
5	Vom Tode Mariä I	9:14
6	Vom Tode Mariä II (Thema – Variationen I–VI)	10:04
7	Vom Tode Mariä III	2:52

Total Time 41:22

Roxolana Roslak soprano

Glenn Gould piano

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Facile comparisons come to mind, of course: Alban Berg's twelve-tone re-write of his early song *Schließe mir die Augen beide*, for example. But, all considerations of scale aside, the distinctions between the two *Marienlebens* are far subtler than the simplistic tonal-atonal rivalries of Berg's settings. A more accurate, if inevitably imaginary, approximation of what Hindemith has wrought could perhaps be attained through a comparison with composers whose styles metamorphosed in a similar, relentlessly organic manner – Bach, say, or in more recent times, Richard Strauss. As with Hindemith, both masters pursued a superficially uneventful evolution and shielded their listeners from technical innovations of a revolutionary order, but for the sake of our comparison Strauss provides the better example. For Bach, by and large, proceeded from simplicity to complexity; his early, diatonically redundant, toccata fugues, for example, re-written in the convolutedly chromatic manner of *The Art of Fugue*, would not serve our comparative case at all. But Strauss, like Hindemith, moved in the opposite direction – complexity to simplicity – and via a route which gradually replaced daring gestures with confident routines. If, then, Richard Strauss had

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On the occasion of its publication in 1948, the composer appended a supplementary essay in which he expressed his not-unexpected preference for the later version. The essay is brilliantly written, tightly argued – indeed, one of the finest of Hindemith's not inconsiderable literary efforts – and, in addition to the inclusion of some shrewd comments on the then-current musical scene (they read as though written yesterday!) and a vivid evocation of the compositional climate of the 1920s in which the first *Marienleben* was conceived, offers some

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The second *Marienleben* risks no such ambiguities. The piano part is not only less interestingly conceived, it is also, curiously, far less idiomatic. (Hindemith acquired some bad piano-texture habits in the 1940s: his 1945 Concerto contains more embarrassingly redundant octave couplings than any comparable work this side of Max Reger’s F-minor.) The wiry, string-like, textures of the first version have given way to complacent chord-clusters and predictable cue-oriented interludes:

Example 1 (Original Version)

The musical score for Example 1 (Original Version) of Hindemith's *Marienleben* is presented in two systems. The first system features a vocal line (Soprano) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "Stau - tet ihr nicht: der gro - ße Bröt - - frucht - baum warf ei - nen Schat - ten." The piano part has a dynamic marking of *ff* and a tempo marking of *Sehr verbreitern*. The second system shows the vocal line with lyrics: "Ja, das kam von mir. Sehr breit". The piano part continues with a dynamic marking of *ff* and a tempo marking of *Sehr breit*.

Example 2 (Revised Version)

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The top system features a vocal line with lyrics in German: "Stau-net ihr nicht: der gro-ße Brot-fruch-te-baum warf ei-nen Schat-ten. In, das kam von". Above the vocal line, there are dynamic markings: *mf*, *f*, and *Ein wenig breiter*. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The bottom system shows a piano solo with the tempo marking *Im Zeitmaß* and the instruction *mit*. The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature.

As regards Hindemith's second major point – that the original version “was essentially a series of songs held together by the text and the story unfolded in it, but otherwise not following any compositional plan of the whole” – the composer points out that the cycle is divided into four “clearly separate groups” (this is not, however, an innovation – the original version was as well), that the first of the groups (songs 1–4) deals with the “personal experience” of the Virgin, the second (songs 5–9) contains “the more dramatic songs ... in which a considerable number of persons, actions, scenes, and circumstances are shown,” the third (songs 10–12) offers “Mary as sufferer,” and that the fourth (songs 13–15) is “an epilogue in which persons and actions no longer play any role.”

Hindemith, indeed, supplies a graph detailing the expressive and dramatic intensity levels attained in the various segments, and here, to be sure, there is one major structural change: Song No. 9 – “Von der Hochzeit zu Kana” – is now conceived as the culmination of group 2 rather than, in the original version, the prelude to group 3. Further, Hindemith claims that it is “the dynamic climax of the whole cycle ... the song which in volume of sonority, in the number of harmonies employed, in variety and power of tonality, and in compelling structural simplicity of form represents the highest degree of physical effort in the presentation of the whole work ... The curve of dynamic expenditure rises from the beginning of the cycle to the ‘Hochzeit,’ and falls from there to the end.”

In this emphasis, Hindemith is, quite properly, more faithful to Rilke than to conventional interpretations of the Gospel according to St. John; the importance he accords this song in the latter setting, however, puts him firmly in the camp of those exegetes who decode from the Cana story the irruption into history of the Messianic hour of Jesus. Rilke transforms Christ's enigmatic reply “Mine hour is not yet come” into a merger of the symbols of water, wine and blood, and Hindemith, in both versions, transforms this Rilkean elaboration into an extended coda which serves to set the stage for the Passion songs of group 3. In the process, “Hochzeit zu Kana” grows from 82 bars in the original version to 166 in the revision and from a compact fugato into a rather cumbersome aria preceded by a 48-bar piano solo:

Example 3 (Original Version)



Example 4 (Revised Version)



The second version, however, does offer one surpassingly affecting moment – an anticipation of the opening chords of “Pietà” to underline the words “and the whole sacrifice was decreed, irresistibly. Yes, it was written.” In general, however, the dissolve from the bustle of the wedding crowd to Mary’s sudden realization of the miracle as prophecy is much more effectively managed within the scale of the original.

Hindemith’s points about harmonic structuralism are less easily countered. He offers an elaborate series of tonal symbols – the key of E to represent the person of Christ, B for Mary herself, A to depict divine intervention, C for the concept of infinity, C-sharp or D-flat for inevitability, E-flat for purity, and so on. It should be pointed out, of course, that these concepts of key association bear

no relation to such Scriabinesque absolutes as C major = red or D major = yellow, etc.; rather, they represent a system in which all judgments are relative to a given fundamental. If, for example, Hindemith had selected B as the tonal parallel for Christ, then F-sharp, as its dominant, would presumably represent Mary, and E would stand in for states of divine intervention. Hindemith comments that “I do not expect in this tendency to freight musical sound so heavily with ideas that I will encounter any too enthusiastic agreement.” He cites the example of fourteenth-century isorhythmic motets and remarks that “here, as there, what is involved is the overcoming of the mere external sound. In the mere act of listening one can hardly become aware of the intellectualized working principle that was operative in the construction.”

While I confess that, without benefit of Hindemith’s analysis, it would never have dawned on me that the key of F, tritonically related as it is to Mary’s tonal symbol B, is therefore “connected with everything that moves us by its mistakenness or short-sightedness to regret and pity,” I cannot, in good conscience, feel that my appreciation of “Argwohn Josephs” (No. 5) – an F-oriented song in both versions – is lessened by this oversight. On the contrary, it seems to me that, precisely because of Hindemith’s tonal-symbolic fixations, the second version is deprived of much of the magic and ambiguity of the original. For *Marienleben*, after all, is a cycle about a mystery, and to establish an a priori network of finite tonal symbols to which the incomprehensible is directed to conform (even when incomprehensibility itself is replete with its own harmonic parallel) seems to me dramatically self-defeating.

In the third poem (“Mariä Verkündigung”), for example, Rilke consigns to a sublime parenthesis the legend of the unicorn. (“Oh, if we only knew how pure

she was! Did not a hind, that, recumbent, once espied her in the wood, so lose itself in looking, that in it, quite without pairing, the unicorn begot itself, the creature of light, the pure creature.”) Hindemith, in the respective versions, responds as follows:

Example 5 (Original Version)

Wie ein Recitativ, jedoch ganz im Takt
pp poco parlando
 Ein-ge-geht sie
 O, wenn wir wüß-ten, wie rein sie war. Hat ei-ne Hirsch-kuh nicht, die lie-gend, einmal sie im Wald er-zeug-te;
mf

Sehr zurückhalten
pp
 sich so in sie ver-ach-ten, daß sie in ihr ganz ob-ne Paa-ri-gen, das Ein-horn zeug-te; das Tier aus Licht, das rei-ne Tier-
mf

Example 6 (Revised Version)

4
 O, wenn wir wüß-ten, wie rein sie war. Hat ei-ne Hirsch-kuh nicht, die lie-gend, ein-mal sie im
pp

24
 Wald er-zeug-te, sich so in sie ver-sehn, daß sie in ihr ganz ob-ne Paa-ri-gen, das Ein-horn zeug-te.
mf *pp*

28
 Lebhaft (allegro)
 te, das Tier aus Licht, das rei-ne Tier-
mf *f*

That the earlier version focuses on C-sharp (the key which Hindemith, in his subsequent deliberations, assigned to fixed and inevitable states) rather than, as in the second instance, E-flat (the symbol of purity), seems to me a small price to pay for the glorious recitative provided by the original. With the neo-Gregorian reiterations of its *organum*-like accompaniment, with a declamation unimpeded by conventional metrical concerns, this is one of the dramatic high-points of the first song-group. In the later version, Hindemith succumbs to his predilection for sewing-machine rhythms and down-home harmonies and, in the process, relegates Rilke's inspired interior monologue to a casual aside.

In the sixth song ("Verkündigung über den Hirten") the text – "You fearless ones, oh! if you knew how upon your gazing vision now the future shines" – is set as follows:

Example 7 (Original Version)

Example 7 (Original Version) shows a vocal melody and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked *a tempo* and *pp*. The piano accompaniment is marked *a tempo* and *pppp*. The lyrics are: "Ihr Un-er-schrocke-nen, o wuß-tet ihr, wie- jetzt auf eu-rem schau-en-den Ge-sich-te die Zu-kunft scheint." The piano accompaniment features complex, rapid figurations in the right hand and a more rhythmic, dotted pattern in the left hand.

Example 8 (Revised Version)

Example 8 (Revised Version) shows a vocal melody and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked *Immer lebhaft* and *pp*. The piano accompaniment is marked *pp*. The lyrics are: "Ihr Un-er-schrocke-nen, o wuß-tet ihr, wie jetzt auf eu-rem schau-en-den Ge-sich-te die Zu-kunft scheint." The piano accompaniment features complex, rapid figurations in the right hand and a more rhythmic, dotted pattern in the left hand.

The comparison, I think, speaks for itself: the original contrasts the pragmatic concerns of the shepherds with the messenger's feverish determination to communicate the impending radiance to them. It does this via the superb independence of its counterpoint and with an assist from the three-against-two beat divisions; the second version, on the other hand, introduces several of Hindemith's late-period calling cards – the Hanon-like keyboard figurations, the unnecessary doublings, the sacrifice of rhythmic invention at the altar of cadential affirmation. One senses no duality of purpose, no need for an attempt at angelic intervention; these shepherds are a captive audience.

To be sure, there are moments in which Hindemith's preoccupation with architectural clarity makes a contribution to the second *Marienleben*. "Vor der Passion" (No. 10) for example, as realized in the original version, is possibly Hindemith's closest brush with atonality; but the nature of his art was never well suited to a regime divorced from tonal centers, and, although his intention to convey through their absence a state of inexpressible grief is clear enough, he does not, in fact, manage it all that successfully. Although in the later version this song remains tonally distracted, Hindemith does provide a more careful weighting for the relativity of its dissonance.

In both versions, the longer songs are governed by variation-like concepts. "Die Darstellung Mariä im Tempel" (No. 2) is a passacaglia offering twenty realizations (nineteen in the revision) of a seven-bar bass motive with entirely different intervallic properties in the two versions. The first of the three songs devoted to the death of Mary (No. 13) employs a *basso ostinato* for the outer segments of its ternary form, while No. 14 ("Vom Tode Mariä II") is a conven-

tional theme with six not-so-conventional variations. One might expect that such structures would benefit, in their second incarnations, from Hindemith's vast accumulation of experience as a contrapuntist. And there are, to be sure, moments in which the control of chromatic relationships, details of voice-leading, are more securely in hand in the later presentation. More frequently, however, the superb contrapuntal interplay between voice and piano, which in the first version offers textures to rival the harmonic fluidity of a Bach trio sonata, is replaced in the later set by predictable keyboard figurations and unimaginative vocal writing:

Example 9 (Original Version)

Example 9 (Original Version) shows a musical score for a voice and piano. The voice part is marked *pp* and *Langsamer*. The piano part is marked *pp*. The lyrics are: "Sie a-ber kam und hob — den Blick, um die ses al-les anzu — schau-en. (Ein Kind, — ein klei-nes Mäd-chen zwis-chen Frau — en.)". The score is in 3/4 time and features a complex, chromatic texture with a mix of major and minor modes.

Example 10 (Revised Version)

Example 10 (Revised Version) shows a musical score for a voice and piano. The voice part is marked *pp* and *Langsamer*. The piano part is marked *pp*. The lyrics are: "Sie a-ber kam und hob den Blick, um die ses al-les an-zu-schau-en. (Ein Kind, — ein klei-nes Mäd-chen zwis-chen Frau — en.)". The score is in 3/4 time and features a complex, chromatic texture with a mix of major and minor modes. The revised version shows a more predictable keyboard figuration and less complex vocal writing compared to the original version.

Those songs in which Mary herself is in the foreground are invariably confined to triple meter. The entire first group is so organized, with signatures of 3/4 for “Geburt Mariä” and “Die Darstellung Mariä im Tempel,” 6/4 for the “Mariä Verkündigung” and 12/8, 9/8 for “Mariä Heimsuchung.” In later years, such rhythms, particularly in slow tempi, often compromised Hindemith’s work; he frequently employed them to convey states of lullaby-like calm and, almost invariably, associated them with a certain motivic and harmonic complacency. Even in the original version, this temptation is not entirely overcome – the lofty Gregorian melodic touches of “Geburt Mariä” are supported by some decidedly pedestrian V-I chording – but Hindemith’s harmonic imagination is operating in high gear throughout the cycle and almost always saves the day.

With songs 5 and 6 (“Argwohn Josephs” and “Verkündigung über den Hirten”) Hindemith embraces that idiom which, throughout his life, inspired his finest compositions. Joseph’s work-oriented realism (No. 5) and the Shepherds’ earthbound reluctance to accept revelation (No. 6) are conveyed by a relentless motoric energy, with baroque motives firmly ensconced in a rock-solid duple meter.

Song No. 7 (“Geburt Christi”) – one of only three in which Hindemith actually troubles to inscribe the prevailing meter in the score – is, in fact, a metrical elision (3/4, 2/4) and also offers one of the composer’s rare attempts at polytonality. Since Hindemith did not provide an analysis of the original version, one can only guess at the meaning of these bi-tonal, bi-metrical relationships – the obvious explanation relating to the concept of God’s appearance as Man, of the celestial realized in earthly form. Indeed, the striking ambiguity of this song

(superficially, a gentle lullaby) is underscored in the keyboard part immediately following the final words: "He brings joy." The piano's response is an excruciating dissonance – a C-sharp major 6/4 in the right hand supported by C major tonic and dominant tones in the left. It is as though, at the moment of Christ's birth, the Virgin contemplates the suffering which the future holds, and we are reminded, once again, that both Rilke and Hindemith are telling their story entirely from Mary's point of view.

For song No. 8 ("Rast auf der Flucht in Ägypten") Hindemith returns to triple meter (but a very up-tempo triple meter, be it noted!) and provides one of the most striking mini-dramas in lieder literature. (Indeed, I can think of only one other song written in this century which attempts to portray so many moods within so short a span – the opening item, "A Wanderer's Song in Autumn" – from Ernst Krennek's great cycle *Songs of Later Years*.) "Flucht in Ägypten" touches every relevant mood – the frantic rush of the escape (an impulsive, *lebhaftlich* C minor), Jesus' calm vs. his parents' concern (a series of recitatives alternating with abortive *ravvivandos*) and, finally, the "rest" itself (twenty ecstatic elaborations of an A-flat major *ostinato*).

Drama of a conventional sort, of course, was never Hindemith's forte – his Brahmsian pre-occupation with purely musical relevance precluded any abandonment to overt theatrical effect – but here, in little more than four minutes, he summons a musical parallel for every gesture, every impulse, every inclination of the text. I suspect that the secret of his dazzling success with this uniquely moving song is in the challenge which the recitative-*ravvivando* sequence offers to its motoric bookends. Like many composers for whom

rhythmic compulsions were linked to a more generalized formalist pre-occupation – Mendelssohn, say, or Bruckner, perhaps – Hindemith was, perversely enough, at his best in moments of transition, moments which actually threatened the motoric continuum. (The tripartite sequential link between the third and fourth movements of Bruckner's String Quintet, for example, is unquestionably the most dramatic moment in that much-misunderstood composer's output.)

Like "Flucht in Ägypten," "Hochzeit zu Kana" (No. 9) is conceived as a dramatic, rhythmic and dynamic decrescendo and segues to the first of the Passion songs ("Vor der Passion" – No. 10). This is succeeded by the two simplest songs in the cycle ("Pietà" and "Stillung Mariä mit dem Auferstandenen") – the two which, as noted earlier, are presented virtually intact in the later version.

As mentioned above, the first two songs on "The Death of Mary" are variatively inclined – "Vom Tode Mariä I" using the *basso ostinato* of its outer segments to frame a glorious chant-cum-recitative. In "Vom Tode Mariä II" (theme and variations), Hindemith is once again on somewhat precarious polytonal ground. The theme itself, consigned to the piano, merges elements of C minor and C-sharp minor and works through to a not entirely convincing close in D major. The song is highlighted by two superb canonic variations (Nos. 3 & 4), in which the tonality of D assumes primary importance, and a masterful coda (Variation 6). This sequence offers an ingenious division of labor: the upper registers of the piano are assigned a canonic ostinato based on the dirge-like left-hand motive which, in the theme, depicted Mary's death; meanwhile, the soprano is assigned the lowest part, suspended beneath the inspired monotony

of the keyboard, and provided with a truncated version of the piano's original right-hand motives; these, to borrow from Hindemith's own tonal lexicon, defined the "inexorability" of Mary's "entrance into infinity." With this inspired stroke of role-reversing inverted counterpoint, Hindemith achieves a uniquely persuasive imagery: the perfect musical counterpart for the concept of Resurrection.

The ability to sum up a work of substance was never a strong point with Hindemith. (In this, also, he shares a tendency with Brahms and Bruckner.) He lacks some ultimate, transformational impulse – the willingness, perhaps, to set aside the burden of motivic development – the very quality through which, as so often in the final measures of a Wagner opera or a Strauss tone-poem, the motivic strands themselves are ultimately dematerialized. Any number of Hindemith's finest sonata-style compositions are coda-compromised by this inability to transcend his material, this urge to exhibit, ever more concretely, the process of its working-out. In the piano sonatas, for example, the codas are frequently marred by unnecessary triad fill-outs, chord-clusters in inconvenient registers, and a thematic predilection which one can perhaps best define as "when in doubt, augment."

I would dearly like to say that "Vom Tode Mariä III" is the exception that proves the rule. This concluding song, however, sees Hindemith succumbing once again to his familiar finale temptations. Though its central segment finds him in his nimblest trio-sonata mood, its primary theme transforms the motives of Mary's birth into a vigorous *alla breve*, octave-doubled in keyboard registers five octaves apart, and the concluding fourth chord – open fifths in C and B-flat

respectively – is hammered home by a final embarrassing reinforcement in the upper regions of the treble. It's the sort of wind-up gesture one might perhaps countenance as a musical postlude to a meeting of the Loyal Order of Imperial Moose, but it emphatically does not provide a proper conclusion for a composition that deals with the miracle of transcendence. As a result, the work ends perfunctorily and without emotional reference to the intense devotional atmosphere which otherwise permeates it. And I am saddened to concede this point because, as the reader may perhaps have gathered already, I firmly believe that *Das Marienleben* in its original form is the greatest song cycle ever written.

Footnote:

In a diary entry dated January 1949, an unusually distinguished critic made the following notation: "The *Marienleben* has been put on anew. Earlier, so P.H. confesses, it was only a demonstration of power. Something had to be overcome and anyone who perhaps believes that this could be the result of inspiration was completely wrong."

The critic was Arnold Schoenberg who, according to his biographer, H.H. Stuckenschmidt, had "more sympathy for Hindemith's gifts than the orthodox Schoenbergians liked" and who "regarded the [*Marienleben*] corrections with displeasure." And so say I.

GLENN GOULD
18th February 1978

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