

Paul Hindemith

The Craft of
Musical Composition

Book

with

Partitions

and Introduction by
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THE CRAFT OF MUSICAL COMPOSITION

Theoretical Part

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CHAPTER I

Introductory

"Perhaps some will wonder why I write about music, when there are at least a few excellent men who have written learnedly about it; and particularly at my age, when it has become an almost arbitrary matter, to no longer be bound by the rules of the Law School and Law as they would be in other

Thus wrote Johann Joseph Fux in his *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725), a book which, according to whose basic principles the modern composer learns his craft. Now for the first time the instruments really represent the fullest freedom of composition. When Fux's book was published, the composer was busy at the summit of his art, and at the summit of his technical mastery. But the center of the composer's domain, with all that that shift implies for the art of writing. The step from the noble but narrowly defined art of writing for voices, in which instruments must always play a secondary rôle, toward freer and livelier tone-progressions

"*Multantur fortassis nonnulli, cum talia praestantissimorum Virorum extant monumenta, qui de Musica perquam doctè, & abundanter scripserunt, cur ego ad hoc arduendi genus me contulerim, hoc maxime tempore, quo, Musica jam arbitraria facta, Compositores nullis præceptis, nullisque institutis obstringi volentes, Legum, ac Scholæ nomen ad mortis instar exhorrestunt; . . ."*

such as naturally occur to the gifted instrumentalist, appears to him not as the beginning of a path into a new land, but as a cul-de-sac which must be halted. How in both word and deed he opposed what he considered the barbarization of music may be seen in his compositions and—with explicit reference to the style of the purest and most perfect of writing, Palestrina's *Gradus*.

Perhaps the craft of composition would have declined if a genius like Bach had not sought his way to the highest and most complete mastery of his material. His *Gradus* had not put a brake upon the progress of the art, and set up a standard of excellence in which he showed the first real textbook of composition. At the same time he showed on the one hand only the passing of the art into the hands of the dilettante and tricks of the trade, and on the other hand the production of works that were of little value in historical or practical composition.

A musician who has not more time to contribute to the production and development of the art of composition is, like a painter, on the defensive. He is, indeed, even more so than Fax, for he has no definite artistic activity. A period of over-development, a period of the artificialization of the art, has been followed by a period of reaction. The works of the past are constantly brought back to the attention of the public in a manner of writing which puts them in a false position. The art of composition is not a system except that dictated by pure nature, the system which the hand and misleading fingers draw the lines of. It is a system which is constantly being developed. Now something that cannot be done by the hand of a musician, making every conceivable use of his individual characteristics, cannot possibly be more convincing to the naive listener. In *Die Meistersinger* one reads, it is true, that the composer must make his own rules and then follow them. But this privilege is granted only to a *master*—one, moreover, who knows, or at least feels, the bases of his work provided by Nature.

It is not surprising that things have developed as they have. The discovery, in the last century, of the extreme limits of power and