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# News

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## **INTIMATE HINDEMITH: CHAMBER CD ILLUMINATES SUNNY SIDE OF 'SERIOUS' MODERNIST ICON**

*Clarinetist John Bruce Yeh Headlines New Disc  
of Smaller Works by a Neglected Giant*

The most enigmatic and neglected figure in the pantheon of great modernist composers, Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) is best known by today's audiences for a few serious symphonic works.

In reality a big-hearted humanist with a sense of humor, Hindemith has acquired, since his death four decades ago, an image as a severe, no-nonsense musical personality. Though his tuneful, vigorous, and warm-spirited chamber music is central to the training of many instrumentalists, the public rarely has the opportunity to hear it performed at the highest professional level.

John Bruce Yeh, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's assistant principal clarinetist, sets out to remedy this situation with a new CD, *Clarinet Chamber Music by Hindemith* (Cedille CDR 90000 .072).

The Grammy Award-winning clarinetist is joined by longtime musical friends and collaborators, including the celebrated young Amelia Piano Trio and esteemed composer-pianist Easley Blackwood, who studied composition with Hindemith at Yale University in the early 1950s.

The new Hindemith CD provides a varied and generous program by including the Sonata for Clarinet and Piano; Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet; Two Duets for Violin and Clarinet; Variations for Clarinet and Strings; and Quartet for Clarinet, Violin, Cello, and Piano.

In a pre-release interview, Yeh asserted that Hindemith's music is best approached with plenty of musical imagination. "If you take this music at prosaic, face value, it won't reveal its inner magic. You have to look at it as a treasure hunt. There are a lot of treasures; you just have to dig for them."

Hindemith's Clarinet Sonata (1939), which opens with a sunny, almost Dvorak-like optimism, is one of the great standards of the clarinet literature. The piano part, played here by former Hindemith student Blackwood, is also demanding, especially in the octave passages of the last movement, with its kaleidoscopic exchanges between the performers.

Blackwood, in a recent phone interview, reminisced about the “zany side” of Hindemith's personality. “I've seen him absolutely rocking back and forth with outbursts of laughter in class.” Blackwood recalled a dismal, gray day in New Haven when Hindemith told his students, “New England weather is awful in the fall,” and then impishly commanded an unsuspecting student to sing those words—on the spot. The savvy student sang the impromptu “lyrics” to a melody from Hindemith's own *Symphonic Metamorphoses*.

The intense and virtuosic Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet (1923, revised 1954) springs some surprises. The third movement calls for the high-pitched E-flat clarinet (or “piccolo clarinet”), of which Yeh is an acknowledged master. Here, Yeh says, the difficulty is in voicing the instrument appropriately within the small ensemble setting, as its typical role is to pierce through and make itself heard amid the thicker textures of concert band and symphonic music.

Hindemith constructs a large musical palindrome with the quintet's first and fifth movements. The fifth is the exact “retrograde” of the first: the same notes are presented in reverse order. To Hindemith's credit, this sleight of hand is thoroughly convincing, and neither movement suffers for it.

The delightful Two Duos for Violin and Clarinet — an unusual pairing — and rarely recorded Variations for Clarinet and Strings, based on a memorable theme, are from *The Music Day at Plön*, a set of short pieces Hindemith wrote on commission in 1932 for a daylong amateur music festival in the small north German town.

The disc concludes with what is arguably Hindemith's strongest and most musically effective work for clarinet. Nearly 30 minutes in length, the Clarinet Quartet (1938) is among the few modern classics for the unusual assemblage of clarinet, violin, cello, and piano. As with the Sonata, Hindemith's inventive counterpoint, a characteristic he shared with another great German composer,

Bach, is on display. There are engaging conversations between clarinet and violin, plus what Yeh describes as “big moments” with a “very symphonic feel.”

A Los Angeles native, Yeh joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as solo bass clarinetist in 1977, at the age of 19, at the invitation of Sir Georg Solti. He has been the orchestra’s assistant principal clarinetist and solo E-flat clarinetist since 1979. An avid chamber musician, Yeh organized the Chicago Pro Musica and shared in its 1986 Grammy Award for Best New Classical Artist. His previous recording as soloist on Cedille Records was *Clarinet Sonatas by Easley Blackwood and Max Reger* (Cedille CDR 90000 022). Subsequently, his Chicago Pro Musica recorded *Early Chamber Music of Elliot Carter* for the label (Cedille CDR 90000 048).

Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE), dedicated to showcasing Chicago’s most noteworthy classical artists, is an arm of the nonprofit Chicago Classical Recording Foundation.

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**CLARINET CHAMBER MUSIC BY HINDEMITH**  
**(Cedille Records CDR 90000 072)**

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano  
Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet, Op. 30  
Two Duets for Violin and Clarinet from *The Music Day at Plön*  
Variations for Clarinet and Strings from *The Music Day at Plön*  
Quartet for Clarinet, Violin, Cello, and Piano

**John Bruce Yeh, clarinet**  
**Easley Blackwood, piano**  
**Amelia Piano Trio**  
**Baird Dodge, viola**  
**Maureen Nelson, violin**