

KARL AMADEUS HARTMANN

Dr David C F Wright

WARNING Strict copyright exists on this article and all of Dr Wright's articles

Hartmann is arguably the greatest German symphonist since Brahms. He is every thing that a great composer should be. His music is original; his work develops over the span of his creative life; he is a marvellous craftsman; he has a truly amazing technique; he is the greatest orchestrator since Wagner, who remains the finest of them all. His music has a tremendous energy and elan. He can write tender music of the highest quality and his music is never trite. He was not just a composer of pretty tunes as was Schubert. In fact, his themes, whilst attractive, are also very profound. But the quality that Hartmann has, which is the most immediately obvious, is the sheer excitement which his music generates. He could write an *Allegro* and keep it going for ten minutes without easing up. Bruckner, fine composer though he was, could not do that. Neither could the genius of Sibelius. Elgar was the worst offender... all his *allegros* are slow and get slower at various stages of most of his symphonic works. It should be remembered that *allegro* means quick, merry and lively.

Hartmann belongs to a group of great German composers of the twentieth century and they were few. Boris Blacher was the most innovative, Fortner was a master, Von Einem was very skilled and Hans Werner Henze also borders on genius. But the composer that began the German revival was the legendary Paul Hindemith who is still maligned and for reasons I cannot fathom. He revitalised an interest in all musical forms; on the one hand, he went back to the past and the great German tradition, but then so did Max Reger, another maligned composer, and a magnificent one too, but Hindemith also explored the new. 'Music Nova' was the term used. Both Reger and Hindemith revived the interest in Bach and composition in clear contrapuntal lines. Reger made his own compositions highly original, rich in chromaticism whereas Hindemith majored on the diatonic scale and modes. These composers lifted German music out of a potentially dull Teutonic tradition and gave it life. Some composers may have gone too far. For example, Schoenberg wrote some cabaret songs and Hindemith's early works are erotically perverse.

Hartmann studied with Webern, the supreme master of clarity, and also with the finest German conductor of the last 150 years, Hermann Scherchen. These two teachers were very much at opposite ends of the musical spectrum. Webern was concerned with economy of style and texture, and Scherchen had an immense command of the orchestra and all its capabilities, but then so did Hindemith.

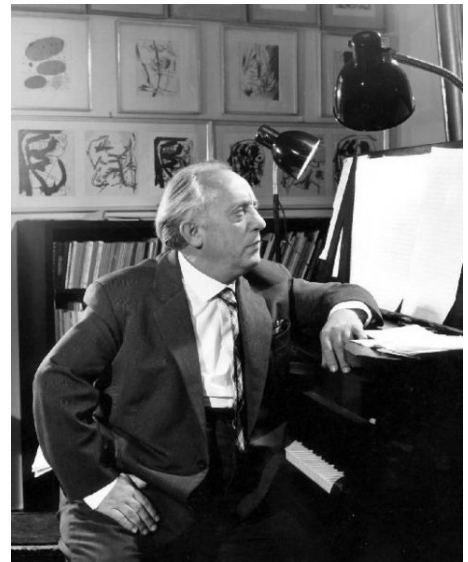
What originally drew me to Hartmann many years ago was nothing to do with his music, but his bravery. He was born on 2 August 1905 and lived all his life in Munich. His father was Friedrich Richard Hartmann renowned for his flower painting. Karl hated both Nazism and Hitler and anything that ranked of extreme socialism and communism. He did not flee Germany. Even in the war years he stayed in Munich still hating what Hitler and the Nazis were doing to his people. I remember when I wrote my first book, which was about the life of Graham Scroggie, I quoted what Scroggie said in 1940, "We have no quarrel with the German people. We have a quarrel with Hitler and the political ideology he has produced". Hartmann would have agreed with that truth.

Cowardly Benjamin Britten fled from Britain when war was obvious. And whatever excuse is given, he did so because he was a coward and non-patriotic. Hartmann stayed at home in a country he knew was in the wrong, diseased by the evil of Hitler the madman. One can only admire a man like Hartmann and when one listens to his music that admiration increases.

Hartmann witnessed Hitler's attempt to take over the government by his putsch at the Munich Beer Hall with 300 of his brown shirt soldiers. Hitler was arrested and spent a short time in prison. Hartmann saw the rise of Nazism and the appalling crime committed by this Socialist group.

Hartmann's music is not for the shallow music lover. Those who are a pretty-tune-music-lovers wanting predictable harmonies will not relish the genius of Hartmann.

The *Symphony no.1* is subtitled *Essay for a Requiem* and was written in 1934/5 and revised during



1954/5. It is scored for contralto and orchestra and uses texts from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* 1855/92. There are five movements, the central one being purely orchestral, a theme and variations in fact. The official *Symphony no. 1* was the *Miserere* of 1923/4 which was withdrawn. This was while he was a student at the Munich Academy. The present *Symphony no. 1* began life as the *Symphonic Fragment* of 1935/6 premiered at Frankfurt am Main in 1948. But in its final revisions, the *Symphony no. 1* expresses mourning, despair and rage at the Nazi regime.

The opening movement has a stunning beginning. The contralto sings, 'I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world'. The second movement is a setting of *Spring* based on words used by other composers such as Hindemith and Roger Sessions, 'When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed'. The *Theme and Variations* has a wonderful Webernesque simplicity and the music is never weak. The fourth movement is a setting of *Tears*

Not a star shining, not a star
All dark and desolate
Moist tears from the eyes of a muffled heart.

The anguish is simply magnificent. Hartmann not only laments German politics but German morality. He introduces a jazz piano indicating the seediness of German life with its nightclubs and the sadistic sex that was a feature of German brothels.

It was in the 1850s the French took the earliest form of the camera and used it to take erotic and pornographic pictures. The Germans seized upon this immoral activity and in the 1880s a series of books written by German scientists, some allegedly in the medical profession, wrote books advocating nudity as healthy and so, nudism, or naturism, was born. It was a natural development from Socialism which embraced the theory of evolution that man was merely an animal and animals did not wear clothes and were not sexually inhibited. Between the wars German would go for 'hikes' in the wooded countryside sometimes travelling to sites on bicycles. In the woods they would take off all their clothes and dance and frolic, go swimming and engage in sports. This was merely a smokescreen for sexual vanity and voyeurism. Hitler capitalised on this idea by promoting sport among the Hitler Youth knowing that sports which necessitated few clothes, known as glamour sports, encouraged voyeurism and sexual activity between his youth and therefore could advance his Arian race. Swimming pools and the beach, as well as the sports' field, are regular hunting grounds for perverts and paedophiles. Hitler was a pervert himself and he also had a morbid fascination with rotting corpses. This background, which Hartmann knew, leads me to the finale of Hartmann's *Symphony no. 1*

The fifth movement is an epilogue, a setting of *Supplication*, in which Hartmann's hatred of war and Nazism in particular, is expressed in visions of torn bodies on battlefields. *O my earth I charge you, lose not my sons, lose not my sisters.*

When one considers the sad song cycles of Mahler such as *Kindertotenlieder* and some of the accounts of soldiers going to war and never coming back as in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* one can admire them but where Hartmann succeeds is that his utterance is simpler and never grandiose. He avoids the music of war machinery with all its percussive and military sounds. Hartmann is more discreet, subtle and, even when dealing with anguish and horror, he and his music are in control ... never pompous, never military since he not only hated war but the ridiculousness of having to dress up for it. He would have agreed with A. E. Houseman who laments Commanding Officers sending soldiers off to die

The *Symphony no. 1* is not so much an anti-war symphony but an anti-Nazi symphony. It depicts Hartmann's loathing of Hitler, Socialism, the Jesuit military tactics that inspired Hitler, and the gross immorality of the German people.

In this symphony, every note counts; every harmony is exactly right. It is a profound, moving, evocative compelling symphony. The final pages are staggering too... if you have the insight to appreciate the point that is being made.

The *Symphony no. 2* is a one movement work, an expansive *Adagio* for large orchestra with an important part for a baritone saxophone. It dates from 1945/6. Its songlike theme on the saxophone, reminiscent of a Red Indian incantation, leads to a towering and glowing climax. The music presents itself as a lament for a bombed Germany and for a people deceived and destroyed long before 1939 by a grossly evil man and immoral ideology. The work may also be a tour of bombed out cities with pictures of Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Dresden and Leipzig and then on to the camps with the emaciated naked bodies being shovelled into pits. These were once living people who were loved and who had lives before them. The saxophone solo

seems to depict single people in their loneliness. Here is an orphaned child looking at the camera with painful yearning, desparately alone; here is an attractive young woman knowing that her fiancée is dead somewhere, but where? This engagement ring... what does it now mean? Here is a mother searching for her loved ones. What has become of them? What a waste is war. What condign shame and disgrace has befallen Germany. Can they ever be forgiven? The whole world looks upon this nation with shock that has robbed them of the power to hate. The depth of Hartmann's music is extraordinary but it is not gloomy. There is an expression of Germany which has been deceived but there is a quiet optimism. There is also a hint of Hartmann's self-vindication. It is not a callous 'I told you so' but a lament coupled with hopes for the future. The horn writing may recall the sunrise in Carl Nielsen's *Helios Overture*. Profound distress gives way to brilliant radiance, bustling excitement, a scurrying 'perpetuum mobile' and a powerful confidence. The war is over. Hitler is dead. Germany is defeated and that is the cause for Hartmann's celebration. He rejoices in the hope that the Nazi brand of socialism will die too. This is wonderful music of intellectual and emotional intensity. Very, very special.

The two movement *Symphony no. 3* was compiled from earlier works, the *Klagegesang Symphony* of 1944 and the aforementioned *Sinfonia Tragica* of 1940-3. It begins with a *larg'* and a double bass solo which passes to a string quintet and the full strings in music of Bergian warmth which introduces a fugue. It is rich in texture, poignant and utterly convincing. Music of rare beauty which some will dismiss as belonging to a modern idiom as if that were a crime. By turn, it soars, it sings, it reflects, it laments, it lifts and it communicates, which is what all music should do. But the beauty of Hartmann's music is not restricted to simple or diatonic terms. When the full orchestra and the timpani enter in the *allegro con fuoco* (a tremendous moment) the virtuoso fugue begins and that is what it is. It makes the great fugues of Bach and Handel seem mundane. It is such a good fugue that you are unaware that that is what it is. Academia does not get in the way and spoil it. And when the music becomes frenetic one is aware of how good the orchestra and the conductor have to be. But there is more excitement to come. When the timpanist unleashes his powers and the strident brass enter we are in another world, a world where music is so ecstatic that one has to remember it was written by a mere mortal. The sinister chords give way to music-box innocence and playfulness... the simplicity of the string writing in the opening *Largo* is now with the woodwind. This is really a Concerto for Orchestra. The music heads towards a climax but is delayed, but the high horns, snarling brass and shrieking woodwind do not fail both to fascinate and impress. The music is episodic and needs a great conductor for it to hang together. The second movement is also strong but also episodic. Its constant shift of moods may not make for a unified whole but there are some unforgettable moments.

One expects a symphony for strings to be light and brief. It is often the composer's first attempts in this form as with Malcolm Arnold and Kenneth Leighton, for example. Hartmann's *Symphony no. 4* for string orchestra started life as a *Concerto for soprano and string orchestra* in 1938. In its present form it was presented in 1948 before the *Symphony no.3*.

The *Fourth Symphony* last for about 33 minutes being in four substantial movements. The opening movement is elegiac, a passionate *Lento*. Although again rich in texture, it is uneasy in utterance, aurally compelling and arguably the finest work for string orchestra ever written. The climax of the movement is one of rugged grandeur unparalleled in string orchestra literature. The only other composer who could write in such a masterly way for string orchestra was Bartok. The movement seems to be a narrative, another personal view of shamed Germany yet the high violin solos at the end may depict a type of resurrection. The middle movement is usually lively but somewhat hesitant. It makes references to the composer's *String Quartet no.1*, which won first prize in the Carillon competition in 1936. The uncertainty of Germany's future, its industrial power, the return to family life and its values (you can hear laughter in this movement), the victory over Nazism and the recalling of bitter memories are all here. But it will be too much for some people.

The finale is another slow movement and is also *appassionato*. It is incredibly powerful at times and again not for shallow music-lovers. One climax is simply crushing.

The *Symphony no.5* of 1945 is entitled *Sinfonia Concertante* and was originally written in 1932 as a *Trumpet Concerto* which in actual fact it still is. It is written in an eighteenth century style with three short movements *Toccata*, *Melodie* and *Rondo*. Again, Hartmann's political and moral views are here displayed in his retrospective appeal to a pre-Nazi Germany hence the anachroistic style of the music. The wind orchestra has the lions share of it and there are no upper strings. This is an excellent example of how to write for wind

and keep orchestral balance. The saxophone of the *Symphony no.2* has something to say as well.

Arguably, Hartmann's greatest work is the *Symphony no. 6* of 1951-3. It is based on his earlier work the *Symphony L'Oeuvre* after the Zola novel. This appeared in 1938 although only the *adagio* was used. The symphony is in two movements, the *adagio* and a *toccata variata*. The *adagio* is nowhere near as heavy as those in the *Symphony no.4* and has a more airy texture but still that warm intense romanticism. Harps, bells, piano duet, explosions and unleashed power, uncontrollable excitement, crashing climaxes and a soaring melody line. What else do you want? The orchestration is flawless.

And what a start to the second movement. A fugue gives way to an essay of majestic power, ongoing motion and stirring timpani attacks. The excitement is almost dangerous. What this ultra-special music does is to stir the maximum level of real and lasting enjoyment. The fugue returns and the final pages are electric, dramatic, terrifying, stunning and unbelievably exciting.

Hans Rosbaud gave a memorable performance of this work..

The last two symphonies are not derived from any earlier material as are the previous six. *Symphony no.7* dates from 1957/8 and is in three movements namely an *introducion and ricerare*, which harps back to the past and the Germany before Hitler, an *adagio* marked *mesto cantanto and tranquillo* and a finale marked *scherzoso virtuoso*. The opening movement could almost pass for a modern day *Brandenburg Concerto*. When the movement reaches its height its clear textures gives the music a mountain stream freshness and an excitement under control. The Stravinsky of *Dumbarton Oaks* is not far away.

The return to the past, as in the *Symphony no. 5*, is stylistically worrying. It makes the work a hybrid. In the first four symphonies Hartmann had, and developed, his very personal style which, for those who like comparisons, could be described as an aggregate of Mahler, early Schoenberg and Berg but with a greater intensity and a highly personal stamp. The slow movement is one of contemplative beauty and the finale is another virtuoso piece as are the finales of the *Symphony no. 6* and of *Symphony no. 2*. It is exhilarating and full of energy quite at odds, thankfully, with Teutonic and Edwardian music.

What can I say of the *Symphony no. 8* written in 1960-2? It is in two movements, a *cantilene* and *dithyrambe* which is mainly a *scherzo*. It uses sections of the orchestra as groups more so than in previous works and there is a very interesting use of percussion. Yet what this symphony has is a real sense of space or resignation. It is as if the composer knew it would be his last. He incorporates his political and moral views, his hopes for the future, his return to the past and there are sections rich in polyphony. Somehow, this work is the most personal, the most sublime and I can say little more other than to say that I loved it the first time I heard it and still do. For me, it is one of those very rare examples of music that, whatever its qualities, gives a deep personal joy that cannot be expressed. This is music beyond praise.

The *Sinfonia Tragica* of 1940 has an interesting history. It was Hartmann's response to Nazi tyranny and the misery that Germany had caused the world. But the symphony fell victim to the war itself. The satirical humour in Hartmann's earliest pieces was deeply affected by Nazi despotism. He said that war was the greatest crime of all and therefore Germany was the world's greatest criminal. His hatred of Hitler and Nazism and every thing that it stood for, caused Hartmann to ban his music being performed in Germany during the war years. He stayed in Munich throughout the war and referred to himself as an internal immigrant.

He sent the only score of the symphony to Paul Collard and a performance was scheduled in Belgium for 1941. Then the evil Nazi machine entered that country and Collard was forced to resign. He returned the score to Hartmann having rehearsed it extensively with the Belgian Radio Symphony Orchestra. With the war over, Hartmann sent the score back to Collard in 1946 but it was lost. Hartmann was philosophical about this. He revised material for the first movement to become the conclusion of the *Symphony no.3*. He was aware that road and rail communications were still a risky business. Curiously the score was found in the Belgian Radio archives in 1973 and it was first performed in 1989 by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Udo Zimmerman at a *Musica Viva* concert which series of concerts Hartmann had founded in November 1945. He was one of the few anti-fascist survivors

Hartmann won the 1949 prize for the most outstanding cultural achievements in the city of Munich. This was the year of his chamber opera after Grimmelschausen, *Das Simplicius Simplicissimus Jugend*.

In 1950 he was awarded the prize of the Munich Academy of Fine Arts.

He composed two string quartets, two piano sonatas concerto for piano and percussion, the glorious concerto for viola, piano wind instruments and percussion and the sublime and darkly passionate 'Concerto Funebre' for violin and orchestra.

He died in 1963 of stomach cancer and thirty years on we still await the recognition of this undisputed genius.

Copyright David C.F.Wright 1994. This article, or any part of it, however small, must not be used, copied, downloaded, altered, stored in any retrieval or any other system without the prior written consent of the author. Failure to comply is illegal and theft being in breach of International Copyright Law and will render any offender liable to action at law.