

A COMPOSER'S WORLD

HORIZONS AND LIMITATIONS

Many thanks, and hoping
for a most fruitful collaboration.
Paul Hindemith
April, 1953

THE CHARLES ELIOT NORTON LECTURES

1949-1950

ad unum
fulcrum

A COMPOSER'S WORLD

HORIZONS AND LIMITATIONS

PAUL HINDEMITH

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fold experiences to the right purpose, and what you can teach him beyond all this is more valuable than the teacher's instructing a pupil: it is the united effort of two equals in the search of perfection, in which the one participant is mostly but not always leading, for his is the greater experience.

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Knowing that in spite of our teaching methods creative talents find their way to the surface, one is inclined to believe in the old adage, "Good teachers are nonexistent; there are only good students." Since, as stated before, nothing but the technical part of a composer's work can be covered by organized instruction, a teacher may not be able to prevent the unfolding of a talent; on the other hand, he may unduly delay the student's development either by applying bad methods or by forcing him into technical and stylistic realms alien to his peculiar talent. Furthermore, he may, by arousing false hopes and pushing nontalents, ruin the mental capacity of many otherwise useful musicians. Provided we had a valuable and nevertheless generally accepted system of musical education and we knew accurately what had to be done in individual cases to make them blossom and ripen, the quality of the teacher would still remain as a factor of uncertainty. This is true, of course, in all branches of scientific and artistic instruction, yet in teaching musical composition this uncertainty between teacher and student. The technique that can be taught perpetually threatens like an overshadowing cloud the relation corresponds roughly with the subject matter of our fifth chapter, although the conclusions there drawn are (and will remain for some time) ideal requirements which for many teachers are of no practical value. If uncertainty prevails concerning the apparently so well-known basic truths of music and their technical application, we cannot expect any clear-sighted confidence in the other intellectual and emotional aspects as shown and discussed in the other chapters of this book. They are beyond all technique, lofty and evasive, and cannot be brought within the regulating fences of a normalized teaching system that will give an account of their presence; no marks and credits can honestly be given for their

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