

## Paul Hindemith Viola Sonata Op. 11 No. 4

When I first began to play the viola at the age 14, switching from violin to viola, one of the first pieces my teacher advised me to listen to for inspiration was a recording of Paul Hindemith's Viola Sonata, Op. 11 No. 4. What a lasting effect it had on me. A decade on, I am in the process of preparing to perform this sonata for a recital as part of my postgraduate degree at the Birmingham Conservatoire. I have encountered many challenges.

The sonata opens with a dreamy and mystical Fantasie, which requires incredible bow control in both slow legato passages and fast virtuosic passages. To achieve a legato sound within the opening, I first practise only the right hand, listening out for a smooth sound over string crossings whilst maintaining total legato throughout the bow, especially when changing direction at both ends of the bow. I also practise pulsing with the bow in quavers, which is useful for bow distribution and achieving evenness of sound. I similarly work with the left hand alone, feeling the connection between every single note, and then join these elements together under speed, over speed and at tempo. For the virtuosic passages in the cadenza, I start by working repeatedly on small units, listening out for total clarity and gradually making the units longer. I find altering the rhythm helps left hand agility. Once I feel confident with all this, I practise the fast sections with different bowings, changing bows per beat, per bar and 'upside-down' bowing.

The Fantasie is followed by a Theme and Variation in the second movement, leading to a total of seven variations of the theme right up until the end of the third movement's coda. One of the most challenging aspects of preparing this sonata has been taking the character of each of the different variations into consideration, and making them relate to each other whilst also having their own unique characteristics. Hindemith is very precise in his markings, and I spend time practising the start and end of each variation considering these, which helps me to link the sections. I ask myself whether it feels and sounds like a natural flow from one variation to the next.

Another very important point in this sonata is the range of dynamics. This work contains *fff* in several places and the total dynamic range is *pp* to *ffff*. In order to bring out such vast dynamic contrasts, I have practised these away from the sonata with scales and studies, and have thought about exactly how I am achieving each dynamic through the amount of weight I am applying through the right arm, bow speed and bow position on the string. By acknowledging the physical feeling for each dynamic, I am able to apply them to the sonata.

Recording my practice has been fundamental and listening back attentively enables me to achieve a greater understanding of exactly how my intentions are coming across.

Jack Gillett