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Apparebit repentina dies: *Hindemith's musical panorama of Judgment Day*

ABSTRACT: In 1947, while teaching at Yale University, the German composer Paul Hindemith (1895–1963) wrote a composition for mixed chorus and brass ensemble based on an anonymous Latin hymn believed to date from the 8th century or before. This text, which he had discovered in *The Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse*, tells in a poetic rewording of New Testament passages of the events to be expected on Judgment Day. Below a deceptively simple surface with regular trochaic tetrameters organized in 23 couplets that are launched by the consecutive letters of the alphabet, the hymn hides various dramatic perspectives. These include a narrator announcing what is to come and later describing what he witnesses in a vision, direct-speech dialogues between Christ as the Judge of the World and the two groups of the chosen and the damned, and a concluding moral admonishment addressed by the pious author to his contemporary listeners or latter-day readers.

As the analysis of the musical structure and texture, meter and rhythm, thematic material and tonal organization shows, Hindemith achieves a semiotic rendering of these aspects and many finer nuances. Just as the medieval text ostensibly uses only one mode throughout without depriving the message of any of its colorful expressiveness, so Hindemith's music uses only one constellation of sound colors — choral singing against or in alternation with ten brass instruments — to bring the multifaceted scene to life. This music is both text setting and scenic painting, replete with refined allusions as well as onomatopoeic depiction, weaving a web of signification with which the composer at once heightens and deepens the early poet's message.

KEYWORDS: Paul Hindemith, The Last Judgment, 20th-century choral music, musical hermeneutics, musical parameters interpreting text

The Latin Hymn and the musical layout

In 1946, the great American conductor Robert Shaw commissioned and later premiered Hindemith's Whitman-based Requiem *When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd*. Fascinated and profoundly moved by this experience he promised himself that he would return to works written by the then exiled German composer. Thus it was Shaw whom Harvard University entrusted with another Hindemith premiere, that of *Apparebit repentina dies*, a work for mixed chorus and brass ensemble that the university had commissioned for its "Symposium on Music Criticism". The first performance took place on 2 May 1947 with the Col-

legiate Chorale and members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra (four French horns, two trumpets, three trombones and a tuba).

Hindemith bases the composition on a Latin hymn he had found in *The Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse*. While its author remains unknown, the time during which it was created can be inferred by the fact that the hymn was already mentioned by the Venerable Bede (672/3–735) and must therefore have been written in the early 8th century or even before. The text consists of 23 couplets whose initial letters spell the Latin alphabet. The total of only 23 lines is owed to the fact that the early medieval author used the classical Latin alphabet, which did not contain the letter *w*, did not yet distinguish between J and I or between V and U, but included the letter K despite its extremely rare use. The anonymous author's self-imposed acrostic game (which is not replicated in any of the hymn's translations into modern languages) led to two oddities of spelling: the letters K and X, which did not exist as initials in classical Latin, highlight two crucial words: *Karitas* and *Xristus*.

In terms of rhythm and meter, all of the hymn's lines are conceived in trochaic tetrameter with a shortened final foot, i.e., in an accent pattern that can be represented as $\bar{\circ} \circ \bar{\circ} | \bar{\circ} \circ \bar{\circ} | \bar{\circ} \circ \bar{\circ} | \bar{\circ} \circ \bar{\circ}$.

This strict metric organization leads to some minor and one major violation of the individual words' natural stress patterns. Most blatant is the required pronunciation of the line beginning with the initial U, where the name of the sacred city fits into the metric organization only when pronounced "Jérusálem." Hindemith mentions this in the preface to his score but sets the line in accordance with the medieval author's compromise. Neither the Latin original nor the best-known English translation are rhymed.

In terms of the text's message, the hymn may be regarded as a medieval antecedent of the *Dies irae* included in Catholic requiem compositions. Following three introductory couplets paraphrasing a passage from the letters of St. Peter (2 Petr 3:7 + 10), the poetic evocation of the Final Judgment combines the appropriate verses from the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 25:31–46), supplemented with borrowings from the parables (Mt 13:42 + 49–50). The closing couplet returns to Matthew's representation of Judgment Day (Mt 25:1).

In the years prior to his appointment as a professor of composition at the Musikhochschule in Berlin, Hindemith had studied several foreign languages, among them Latin. His desire to probe the depth of all nuances hidden in the fairly demanding medieval text benefited from the English translation by Bernard S. Greenberg.

Hindemith's composition encompasses four movements. In the first movement he sets the seven couplets in which the poet announces the advent of the Day of Wrath and the apparition of Christ as King and Judge of the World. These lines use allusions to frightening changes in nature and cosmos to give an impression of the unimaginable power of this event. The second movement contains the nine couplets relating the scene in which Jesus separates the just from the sinners and

judges each group in accordance with their lives” deeds. The third movement is based on the five couplets narrating how the just and the sinners respectively are led to their destiny, by plunging into the depths of hell or ascending to the realm of the Blessed. The brief fourth movement adds the two final couplets, in which the poet complements the biblical story with the moral admonition. In this literary coda, the pious author encourages the faithful among his Christian audience to avoid temptations and to lead their lives in continuous awareness of the final judgment awaiting them.

The great day of the Lord will suddenly appear

Apparebit repentina dies magna Domini,
fur obscura velut nocte improvisos occupans.

Brevis totus tum parebit prisci luxus saeculi,
totum simul cum clarebit praeterisse saeculum.

Clangor tubae per quaternas terrae plagas concinens,
vivos una mortuosque Christo ciet obviam.

De caelesti iudex arce, majestate fulgidus,
claris angelorum choris comitatus aderit.

Erubescet orbis lunae, sol et obscurabitur,
stellae cadent pallescentes, mundi tremet ambitus.

Flamma ignis anteibit justis vultum iudicis,
caelos, terras, fluctus maris et profundi devorans.

Gloriosus rex sedebit in sublimi solio;
angelorum tremebunda circumstabunt agmina.

The great day of the Lord will suddenly appear
like a thief in the dark of night befalling the unwary.

All the brief splendor of the ancient world then shall appear
just as it becomes clear and all the world will vanish.

The din of the trumpet sounding through the four quarters of the earth
summons the living and the dead together to meet with Christ.

From His heavenly citadel the Judge, resplendent with majesty,
will come along with shining choirs of angels.

The orb of the moon will redden, the sun will go dark,
will dim and fall, the course of the earth will tremble.

Flame of fire will go before the Will of the Just Judge,
devouring the heavens and earth, the flows of the sea and of the depths.

The glorious King on high will sit on the throne
surrounded by quaking hosts of angels.

In the first of his four movements, Hindemith uses structure, texture, and thematic material to create messages that highlight the manifold layers of the text. The music is designed in five sections, which are characterized as follows:

- I mm. 1–70 fanfare ('broad') + instrumental fugue 1 ('Allegro'),
- II mm. 71–98 chorale (Allegro a tempo), largely unaccompanied
- III mm. 99–109 contrast ('Slow')
- IV mm. 110–142 instrumental fugue 2 (Allegro), with homophonic chorus
- V mm. 142–223 instrumental fugue 1 with new conclusion, with polyphonic chorus

The long first section consists of a slow introduction in *ff*, in which French horns and trombones in unison play a motif that climaxes in an A-flat-major triad played jointly by all ten brass instruments:



Example 1: The fanfare calling to the Last Judgment

This fanfare-like beginning is followed, in a faster tempo and a slightly reduced volume, by an instrumental fugue whose twelve single and group entries build three sections:

- Section I mm. 5–24 four subject entries
- Section II mm. 24–48 two single subject entries + two strettos
- Section III mm. 48–71 four subject entries¹

The consonant closing chord of the three fugal sections progress from B-flat via E-flat back to the initial A-flat, whose function as a tonal center is confirmed with a renewal of the extended A-flat-major triad in all ten brass instruments.

The fugal subject with its density of perfect fourths sounds positively grandiose, even majestic. It announces unmistakably that a grand judge is making his

¹ The entries, which are paired, are sounded in Section I by trumpets 1 + 2 (mm. 5–8 from F), horns 1 + 3 (mm. 8–11 from B₁), trombones 1–3 (mm. 12–15 from C) and horns 2 + 4 (mm. 15–18 from F); in Section II in trumpet 2 (mm. 24–27 from G), trombone 3 (mm. 27–30 from D), horn 1/trombone 3 (mm. 33–36/34–37 from D₁/E₁) and trumpet 1/horn 3/trombone 3 (mm. 37–40/38–41/39–42 from A₁/B₁/C); in Section III in tuba + trombone 3 (mm. 48–51 from E₁), trumpet 2 (mm. 51–54 from F), trumpet 1 (mm. 54–57 from B₁) and finally — *poco largamente* in *ff* octaves stretched in an augmented rhythm — in trombones 1–3 + tuba (partially with horns; mm. 63–71 from E₁).

throne. The fanfare motif is employed here as a subject of a second instrumental fugue. Seven entries in two strettos³ progress through various tonal areas, until the music finally returns to A-flat major. The chorus prepares each of the two accumulations of entries with triads that emphasize the solemnity of the moment by means of their volume and rhythm. At the same time, the threefold darkening of the chords from major to minor ('Clangor tubae': A-flat major – A-flat minor; "De caelesti": C-sharp major – C-sharp minor; "judex arce": B-flat major – B-flat minor) hints at the serious nature of the event. Toward the end of this segment, the chorus accompanies the fugal passages with a narration in quarter-notes.

After chorus and brass ensemble have once again reached the A-flat-major triad, the thwarted recapitulation can now take its course. The movement's fifth section is the most complex: Hindemith recapitulates the initial instrumental fugue, whose first and second sections he reiterates without any alterations before adding a modified complement. Juxtaposed to this self-contained brass music, the chorus sings a refined passage consisting of various distinct segments, many of which are polyphonic. To go into more detail: Each of the four subject entries of the first fugal section is set against a choral voice that, establishing something akin to a third fugal subject, sings of the reddening orb of the moon. Simultaneously, the other voices, added in free contrapuntal setting, evoke the other cosmic signs of the momentous judgement: the darkening sun, the stars that are beginning to dim and about to fall from the sky, and the trembling of the earth. While the brass instruments revisit the two single entries of the second fugal section, the choral voices show their increasing horror at the impending cosmic catastrophe. Several voices are heard stammering "stellae ... cadent ... cadent" – "the stars ... are falling ... falling," punctuated by substantial rests that suggest a fear so intense as to undermine normal speech. As they tell of the flames that consume everything, the voices set out in dense contrapuntal texture. But as soon as they match the strettos of the instrumental fugue, their words splinter into disjoint fragments.

The newly added complement of the instrumental fugue holds another surprise: for the first time, the subject that was so far restricted to a give and take among the brass players enters the choral layer. In a broader tempo but with unchanged *forte* intensity, winds and singers toss back and forth the musical emblem of the majestic judge, which is initially only slightly shortened, while the words sung still announce a blaze that will devour heaven, earth, and ocean. A sudden hush to *piano* then prepares the ground for the actual appearance of the Heavenly Judge. At this point, the choral voices lead in presenting the subject's head motif, driving it along with imitations and multiple sequence, while the French horns accompany with soft *legato* lines. The evocation that even the angels tremble prompts the winds

³ The entries in each group are played by an increasing number of instruments. First group (mm. 117–127): trumpet 1, horn 1/trumpet 1, trombone 2/horn 1/trumpet 1; codetta leading to a D-flat-major triad. Second group (mm. 130–141): horns 1+3, trumpet 1/horns 1+3, trombones 1+2/trumpet 1/horns 1+3, horns 1–4; codetta leading to an A-flat-major triad.

to return to the fugal subject, whose previously suspended tail component is now developed. Heightening intensity, expressed in a volume increased from *forte* to *fortissimo*, leads the final words of the chorus once again back to the A-flat-major triad. A coda of nine measures allows the brass instruments to append a complete subject entry as well as several fragments before they finally fall silent, leaving the choral sound to die away unaccompanied on a prolonged unison A-flat.

The Merciful and the Selfish

Hujus omnes ad electi colligentur dexteram,
pravi pavent a sinistris hoedi velut fetidi.

'Ite' dicet rex a dextris "regnum caeli sumite,
pater vobis quod paravit ante omne saeculum;

Karitate qui fraterna me juvistis pauperem,
karitatis nunc mercedem reportate divites."

Laeti dicent "Quando, Christe, pauperem te vidimus?
te, rex magne, vel egentem miserati fuimus?"

Magnus illis dicet judex "Cum juvistis pauperes,
panem, domum, vestem dantes, me juvistis humilem."

Nec tardabit a sinistris loqui justus arbiter
'In Gehennae maledicti flammas hinc discedite;

Obsecrantem me audire despexistis mendicum,
nudo vestem non dedistis, neglexistis languidum."

Peccatores dicent "Christe, quando te vel pauperem,
te, rex magne, vel infirmum contemntes sprevimus?"

Quibus contra judex altus "Mendicanti quamdiu
opem ferre neglexistis me sprevistis improbi."

All the chosen shall gather to His right;
the wicked will tremble at His left like stinking goats.

'Go," the King will say to the right, "take up the Kingdom of Heaven
which the Father has prepared for you before all time.

Ye who helped me with brotherly love when I was poor
now, wealthy, take back your reward of love."

Happy, they will say, "When, O Christ, did we view you as pauper
or, O Great King, did we pity Thee when needy?"

The Great Judge will say to them, "When ye did help the poor
and gave food, clothing and shelter ye helped me when I was low."

Nor shall the Just Referee delay, He will say to the left,
'Depart ye accursed into the flames of Hell,

‘Ye did despise hearing me as a beggar beseeching,
ye clothed me not when naked, and neglected me when weak.’

The sinners shall say, ‘O Christ, when did we Thee as pauper,
O Great King, or when sick contemptuously despise thee?’

The High Judge will reply, ‘As long as ye to the beggar
help denied, did ye wicked despise me.’

Hindemith finds fitting musical correspondences for the verdict passed on the contrasting groups of people “living and dead” who are being subjected to the Final Judgment. Many details of this movement are remotely reminiscent of Bach’s Passions. There are altogether four sections, each of which is sounded twice, with different degrees of alterations in the recurrences. (The schema can be represented as A A” — B C1 D — B” C2 D”.)

The first poetic couplet, in which the evangelist calls attention to the *electi* (the “chosen”) on Christ’s right and to the *pravi* (the perverse, vicious, and corrupt) on his left side, is sung a cappella. Above a pedal created with the basses” repeated E, the upper voices move twice from E major to the empty fifth on E, thereby establishing the movement’s tonal center. The phrases A and A” are identical in contour and rhythm but not in terms of their expression. A swift tempo and a solid volume characterize the line about the chosen ones; conversely, the same music sounds sluggish and faint when introducing the wicked ones.

The two times four couplets of the hymn devoted to the two contrasting parts of the dialogue between Christ and the souls he has come to judge correspond to sections B C1 D and B” C2 D” respectively. An agitated passage marked *quasi Recitativo* is reserved for the basses who, with scant support from horns and trombones, articulate Christ’s words as well as the evangelist’s reflections:

“I - te” di-cet rex a dex - tris “reg-num cae-li su-mi-te, pa-ter vo-bis quod pa-ra-vit

an - te omne sae-cu-lum; — Ka-ri - ta - te qui fra - ter-na me ju - vi - stis pauperem,

ka - ri - ta-tis nunc mer-ce - dem re-por - ta - te di - vi - tes.”

Example 4: Christ and his evangelist in the recitative of the basses

In an unaccompanied three-part setting, the female choristers answer by softly enunciating the surprised question how this could possibly be, had they ever seen him poor? Upon which Christ, returning to the more agitated tempo and to the support of protracted horn chords, explains the reason for their justification.

The counterpart to this passage, where Hindemith sets the corresponding exchange between Christ and the damned souls, is distinguished above all in the music setting their question. The composer juxtaposes the three-part women's chorus along with its rhythmically complementing French-horn figures in intervals of fourths and fifths that sound anything but conciliatory. True, the volume in which the sinners ask for explanations is respectfully soft, but in contrast to the harmonious, gentle, and quiet utterances of the chosen ones, these questions sound distinctly more anxious, even hectic. Significantly though, Christ's reply and explanation in section D remains musically unchanged, as if to show him internally disinterested in the nuances of eternal fate his judgments trigger. Only in the closing gesture does Hindemith replace the earlier soft horn figure which ended on the dominant with a more powerful and accented variant of all ten brass players, which leads to the minor tonic on E.

Damnation and Exaltation

Retro ruent tunc injusti ignes in perpetuos,
vermis quorum non moritur, ignis nec restringitur

Satan atro cum ministris quo tenetur carcere,
fletus ubi mugitusque, strident omnes dentibus.

Tunc fideles ad caelestem sustollentur patriam,
choros inter angelorum regni petent gaudia.

Urbis summae Jerusalem introibunt gloriam,
vera lucis atque pacis in qua fulget visio.

Xristum regem jam paterna claritate splendidum
ubi celsa beatorum contemplantur agmina.

Then the unjust are swept back into eternal fires
with immortal worms and limitless fires.

Where Satan with his ministers is held in the dark prison
where everybody weeps, groans and gnashes their teeth.

Then the faithful are taken away to the Heavenly Fatherland.
among choirs of angels they seek the joys of the Kingdom.

They will enter into the glory of the highest city of Jerusalem
in which shines a true vision of light and peace.

Where Christ the splendid King in fatherly glory
is contemplated by the exalted hosts of the blessed.

The work's third movement consists of two dissimilar sections. The anonymous poet recounts the fall of the damned into hell in two, but the rise of the chosen into the New Jerusalem in three couplets. Hindemith strengthens this emphasis on the positive side even further: in his music, the introduction of the meek to heavenly glory takes three times as many measures and five times the performance time as the plunge of the selfish into the unfathomable depths.

The music of the first section is loud, fast, and aggressive. It is pervaded by a figure of the French horns in whose rhythm many listeners have believed to recognize the barking of the legendary hellhounds.

later

syncopated
ending with
4 trombones

Example 5: The barking of the hellhounds

The chords of both chorus and wind ensemble are highly dissonant, their melodic contours in part chromatically narrow, in other parts as if torn asunder by large leaps. With all these features, one is certainly justified to assume that this music is meant to give an onomatopoeic account of what is happening to the souls on trial. Shortly thereafter, when the hymn text speaks of weeping, groaning, and teeth gnashing, the basses together with trombone and tuba reach the pedal tone B-flat, the dominant of the movement's as yet unrevealed tonal center. The tonic thus announced, E-flat, will only be reached in preparation for the closing of the movement's first section, at a time when the choral voices have already fallen silent.

At the very end, even the rhythm of the French-horn figure relaxes: its earlier hoquetus-like sequence of three separated pairs of sixteenth-notes turns into a smoother string of eighth-note pairs, although even these continue to set in on a weak beat and in this shape pervade the first eight measures of the second section — in a polymetric overlay of the 3/2 meter governing this passage. It seems as if the composer wanted his listeners to understand that the difference between those who will spend eternity in heaven or hell respectively is defined by a fundamental difference of the “measure.”

The third movement's second section, which is both much longer and gentler, is composed as a passacaglia in fifteen variations followed by a brief coda. The passacaglia theme, a particularly touching melody, passes through all registers and colors: Introduced in the first horn, it remains for three variations each in the choral altos, the choral basses, and — a little later and in varied format — in the trumpet, in between quickening the breath of sopranos, trombones, and tuba.

Passacaglia

Var. 2: Tunc fi - de - les ad cae - le - stem sus - tol - len - - - - tur pa - tri -
 Var. 3: am. cae - le - stem pa - tri - am, ad cae - le - - - - stem pa - tri -
 Var. 4: am. fi - de - les sus - tol - len - tur, sus - tol - len - - - - tur pa - tri - (am.)
 Var. 6: Cho - ros in - ter an - ge - lo - rum re - gni pe - - - - tent gau - di - a.

etc.

Example 6: The passacaglia theme of the chosen ones

The theme, solemnly swinging in large note values, is embedded in and woven through by various secondary voices moving mostly in quarter- and eighth-notes. In the first seven of the fifteen variations, both the voices carrying the theme and those engaging in contrapuntal play present the first couplet of this hymn segment (see the text cited in the above music example). The mood changes when the narration turns to the entry of the faithful into the eternal celestial realm. In variation 8, the theme is heard as a mere faint shadow played by the homophonically accompanied first trumpet. Though riddled by multiple rests, it is to sound soft and quiet, or so Hindemith's instruction suggests. The choral texture, suddenly also homophonic and simplified to two strands, softens even more when it returns in variation 9 to its earlier three-part setting. After this, listeners will hardly be surprised by the tenth variation, in which Hindemith evokes the city of light and true peace in unaccompanied four-part singing concluding with a phrase ending in augmented note values.

The remaining five variations reinstate the passacaglia's initial tempo with increased intensity. The structural segments are now grouped in a manner easily comprehensible at first listening. Thus the duet of female voices in variation 11 not only contains whole-bar repetitions in the soprano part, but is even taken up verbatim in variation 12 by a duet of male voices. In variation 13, which introduces the final couplet of this hymn segment with "Xristum regem ...," a unison contour of the three higher voices rises in a powerful crescendo from *p* to *ff*. Variation 14 condenses this dynamic climax by means of a choral texture woven through with several melismas in uninterrupted eighth-notes. In variation 15, which sets the final line of this hymn segment, the texture returns once again to motet-style stacking, before the theme concludes (for the second time) with a phrase ending in augmented note values. A coda complements the movement with six measures in luminous E-flat major.

Therefore beware . . .

Ydri fraudes ergo cave, infirmantes subleva,
 aurum temne, fuge luxus, si vis astra petere.

Zona clara castitatis lumbos nunc praecingere,
 in occursum magni regis fer ardentis lampades.

Therefore beware the cunning of Ydros,* support the sick,
reject gold, flee debauchery if you want to seek the stars.

Gird your loins with the pure girdle of chastity
Bring burning torches to the meeting with the Great King.

(*Ydros: "a watersnake, and hence, the Devil.")

The fourth movement is best described as Hindemith's counterpart to the chorale movements in J. S. Bach's Passions. The two couplets in which the hymn's anonymous poet turns to his contemporaries and admonishes them to learn a lesson from this vision of Judgment Day and henceforth to lead a God-pleasing life (so that "the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom," as in Mt 25:1), are cast as identical musical stanzas. The choral setting is homophonic, as is the brass texture. The segments of the two groups are stacked so as to complement one another, in seamless continuation, but without the minutest overlapping.

With regard to the music's thematic material, Hindemith builds a bridge from this conclusion back to the work's very beginning: he bases the final movement on the fanfare motif introduced in the opening measures of the first movement as a unison line in trumpets and trombones heading for the repeatedly mentioned A-flat-major triad climax intoned by the full brass group. After its inception, this fanfare motif had later served secondary duty as the subject of the second instrumental fugue, embodying the image of the celestial tuba that, as the hymn describes it, calls the living and the dead face to face with Christ, when "the Judge, resplendent with majesty, will come along with shining choirs of angels."⁴

In this concluding chorale, the instrumental half of the very first line presents itself as a luciously harmonized return of the fanfare-motif, transposed down a whole-tone: Its tonal development sets out from E-flat, the tonal center of the third movement, and closes with a G-flat-major triad (see the upper part of example 7). The choral voices answer with independent thematic material, albeit in the same tonal frame between E-flat and G-flat major. The chorale's second section, made up of two alterations, modulates through several keys, while the hymn text lists the poet's recommendations for a God-pleasing lifestyle.

The third section, which begins in the middle of m. 8, quotes the motif from the first movement not once but twice. Two trumpets and two trombones begin by playing a version of the original unison contour that is perforated by protracted rests, after which they initially fall silent (mm. 8–11 below). Having filled the brass

⁴ In the Vulgate, the Latin Bible, the wind instrument fashioned from a ram's horn and used in Jewish rituals, now distinguished as a *shofar*, was rendered as *tuba*. In both Luther's German translation of the Bible and the French Louis Segond Bible, angels blow trombones, with the result that the great compositions of sacred music in Germany and France employ trombones in semiotically relevant places. The author of England's King James Bible compared the old Middle Eastern instrument with "trumpets," a decision that can be traced in the instrumentation of countless sacred works from the Anglo-saxon regions.

instruments” silences with short homophonic gestures, the choral voices then add their own imitation, with the motivic line in simpler rhythm and dense *legato* taken up by the sopranos over a richly harmonized texture in the other voices (mm. 11–13). Finally, the chorus and shortly after it also the brass ensemble end in the A-flat-major triad that had served the first movement as its anchor.

Slow

trumpet
1 + 2

trombone
1, 2, 3
tuba

8-14 *mf* *f* *riten.* *p* *p*

fu-ge lu - - xus, si vis a - stra a - - stra pe - te - - re.
ma-gni re - - gis fer ar-den - tes, ar - den-tes lam - pa - - des.

mf *f* *p* *riten.* *mf* *p* *p*

Example 7: The concluding admonition of the heavenly judge, first and third sections

Hindemith's composition as a musical dramatization

Hindemith's musical interpretation of the anonymous early-medieval hymn adapts its overall layout and its text distribution into four movements to the varying speech attitudes. Movement I describes a vision of the outbreak of Judgment Day, using the third person. Movement II consists predominantly of

direct speech, cast in dialogues between Christ and the two groups of people to be judged. Movement III recounts — like movement I in the third person — the prophesied arrival of punishment and reward. With the dramatic action now concluded, movement IV contains an address (cast in the style of early-Christian paranesis), with which the medieval admonisher, stepping away from his vision, speaks directly to his contemporary audience and his later-born readers. In this way, a choral composition foregoing any soloistic impersonation of direct speech nevertheless comes across as a veiled dramatization of the New Testament accounts of Judgment Day.

With regard to its thematic material, Hindemith's music describes a closed circle. At the outset, a characteristic motif both accompanies and symbolizes the appearance of the celestial Judge, thus introducing him already prior to the extensive instrumental and later choral presentation as the drama's central persona. In the closing movement, the same motif underlies the poet's concluding call for a morally purified, pious life. By means of this musical framing, the composer provides the poet a kind of heavenly support: Not he, a mere human being, is the actual author of these admonishments, but Christ himself, in whose music his words are convincingly clad.