

Ealing Chamber Music Club

The November programme starts with sextets by two 16th century composers, Hassler and Schmelzer, by the recorder group (in alphabetical order, Zillah Myers, Lynda Pike, Hilary Potts, Liz Sharma, Linda Shanks, and Vernon Wood). Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612) came from Nürnberg but also worked for the Fugger banking family in Augsburg and the Elector of Saxony. He tended to follow Venetian styles and his dance music improves on the rather simple repetitive balletti which were the models for his Intradas. We will play the Quinta, Septima and Nona Intradas from his publication "Lustgarten" of 1601.

Next is the Sonata V a Sei in F by Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (1623-1680) from his "Sacro-profanus Concentus Musicus" published in 1662. Schmelzer arrived in Vienna during the 1630's and worked for the Habsburg court, rising to Kapellmeister in 1679, but died in a plague epidemic soon after. A virtuoso of his day, he was described as "nearly the most eminent violinist in all of Europe" The Sonata was almost certainly composed for strings but works very well on recorders. The sections are Allegro, Presto and Adagio.

The next work is Beethoven's Op.16 Piano quartet, of which we play the second and third movements. This has its origin in his Quintet for piano, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and horn which was inspired by Mozart's K 452, and is in fact Beethoven at his most Mozartian. When he published the work in 1810, Beethoven also included this version for piano quartet (piano, violin, viola and cello). It is not a mere transcription, but a careful re-casting of the music with alterations to take advantage of the different characteristics of strings vs. winds. What remains constant between the two versions is the piano. In some ways, Op. 16 is actually like a miniature chamber piano concerto so crucial is the virtuosic keyboard part. The middle movement,

Andante cantabile, might have come from a Mozart piano concerto with its graceful, lyrical beauty and its "singing" piano, but the "orchestra" is a string trio and Beethoven distributes and balances the parts in a true chamber style achieving a remarkably gorgeous texture. The finale is a rondo; its terse "hunting" theme, brisk pace, charged drama and occasional riotousness make it a perfectly sparkling and witty conclusion, perhaps more Haydn than Mozart. Beethoven even provided for a concerto-like cadenza for the piano where, to the delight of his audience and the dismay of his fellow musicians, Beethoven took considerable liberties. The players are: Julia Harris (violin), Hilary Potts (viola), Lizbet Fairley (cello), and David Smith (piano).

The last item is Tchaikovsky's String Quartet No. 1 in D major, Opus 11. This was the first completed string quartet of three published during his lifetime. (An earlier attempt had been abandoned after the first movement had been completed.) Composed in February 1871, it was premiered in Moscow on 16/28 March 1871 by four members of the Russian Musical Society: The quartet has four movements, of which the Elthorne Quartet - Mark Johnson & Kate Day (violins), David Smith (viola), Mary Harris (cello) - will play: No.2, Andante cantabile, No.3, Scherzo. Allegro non tanto e con fuoco, and No.4, Finale. Allegro giusto. The melancholic Andante cantabile movement, which has become famous in its own right, was based on a folk song the composer heard at his sister's house at Kamenka whistled by a house painter. When the quartet was performed at a tribute concert for Leo Tolstoy, the author was said to have been brought to tears by this movement.