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Season 2012-13

Zelkova String Quartet

Wednesday, October 3rd, 2012

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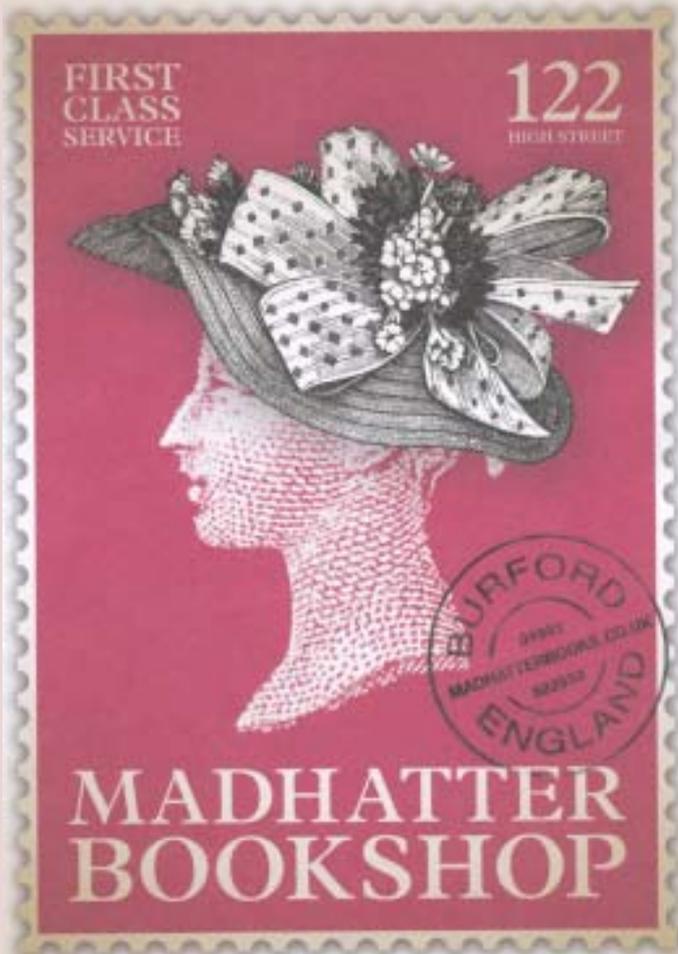
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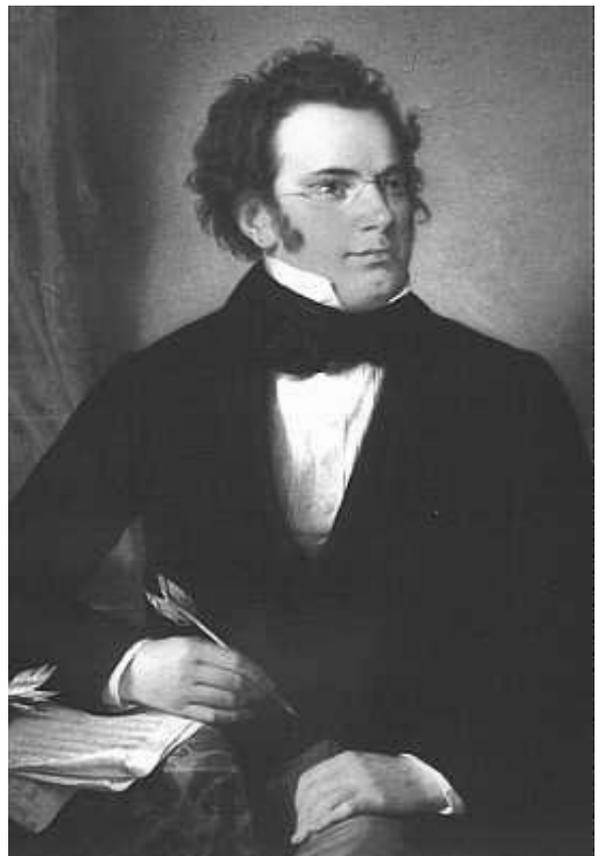
Quartetsatz in C minor D703

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Allegro assai

Reference books do not agree as to the date of this single quartet movement - Grove even argues with itself. One view is that it was the first movement of a quartet which Schubert started at the age of seventeen but abandoned in the middle of the second movement; but the weight of modern opinion is that he wrote it in 1820, at the ripe old age of 23, and it therefore stands as a precursor of the three great quartets of his later years rather than one of the earlier works that he wrote for purely domestic consumption. The history of the piece after Schubert laid it to one side is intriguingly incomplete, but the autograph once belonged to Brahms, and came eventually into the possession of the Vienna *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*. It was first published in 1839 as a single movement, although a fragment of a second movement exists.

Its eight minutes (six clocked up if you really steam, as some quartets do) encompass a busy, almost spooky introduction which soon resolves into one of Schubert's singing melodies, and this alternation of menace and lyricism runs throughout the piece. On the whole the latter wins, although there is a tiny reprise of the other right at the end. One is left wondering what Schubert would have done in another three movements to resolve this battle.



Schubert ca 1822

String Quartet no.8 in C minor op.110

Dmitry Shostakovich
(1905-1975)

Largo
Allegro molto
Allegretto
Largo
Largo

In July 1960 Shostakovich went to Dresden to finish the score for the film *Five days—Five nights*. So moved was he by the sight of the city, much of which still lay in ruins, and the reports of the raids which had caused such devastation, that he wrote this deeply moving quartet in three days. There are similarities to the Eighth Symphony, also an outcry against war, although written in time of war itself. The dedication reads: "In remembrance of the victims of Fascism and war". As other composers have done, Shostakovich further expressed his personal feelings by using his musical 'autograph' D-E flat-C-B (in German notation D-S-C-H, his initial and first three letters of his name). This motif, a sad, unresolved little sequence of notes, a rising minor second followed by a descending one, is the first thing we hear, and occurs throughout the piece, in many transpositions and variations. Alongside are quotations from several other Shostakovich works: the 1st and 5th symphonies, the Second Piano Trio, the Cello Concerto, and his ill-fated opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsinsk*. Privately Shostakovich once described it as a 'eulogy to himself', although some commentators think 'epitaph' is what the composer meant. Luckily he went on composing.



Dresden

The form is unusual, there being five continuous movements, some of which adhere to others so tightly that it is difficult to tell where one ends and another begins. The first is a tragic *largo*, which sets the funereal mood, but the second is rapid, nervous, pell-mell, and almost stumbles into the third, a demonic little waltz. Then it is back to the introspective—some have thought suicidal—Shostakovich. The fourth movement is part angry, part elegiac; and the piece ends in the same sombre mood in which it began.

The quartet was arranged by Shostakovich's friend Rudolf Barshai, the result being known as the Chamber Symphony in C minor. As such it appeared in the 2005-6 Lenthall season, played by the RCM String Band under Mark Messenger.

Interval

String Quartet no.11 in C op.61

Antonin Dvorak

(1841-1904)

Allegro

Poco adagio et molto cantabile

Allegro vivo

Finale. Vivace

In November 1881 Dvorak, who had recently been much engaged in preparing his opera *Dimitry* wrote to a friend "I see in the papers that on 15th December Hellmesberger is to perform my new quartet which does not yet exist! There is nothing left for me to do but compose it." Joseph Hellmesberger was an Austrian violinist and Director of the Vienna Conservatoire, and led a quartet which was the most prominent in Vienna at the time, and had introduced some of Schubert's quartets. He had commissioned Dvorak to write this piece, to the latter's heartfelt gratitude: "Rest assured I will work on my new quartet with the utmost élan, deploying all my art and knowledge, only to be able to give you a composition well done and accomplished, and certainly the good Lord will also inspire me with some melodies." There was another major obstacle thrown into the quartet's path when the Ringtheatre, where the opera was to have its premiere, burned down, but the piece eventually saw the light of day, in Bonn, played by a different quartet altogether. The Hellmesbergers introduced it to Vienna and its Prague premiere was in January 1884.

A useful rule of thumb when listening to a piece of late eighteenth-century music whose composer you do not know is to guess "Dvorak". He was certainly a bit of a chameleon, distilling what his voracious ear drank in into a wide variety, stylistically, of works, and this might fox the listener on a blind hearing. The opening is almost Beethovenian in its immediate launching into dramatic development, but Dvorak the romantic soon takes over and we are treated to some sumptuous melodic invention. In the slow movement the two violins duet wistfully over a discreet, even shy, accompaniment from the lower strings. The scherzo takes as its starting point the first theme from the opening movement, but after some development of this its trio resolves into a folk-like melody, much more like the 'real' Dvorak than its scurrying companion. In the finale Dvorak finds the voice that is arguably his alone, in a sunny question-and-answer theme that is the essence of effortless charm.



Joseph Hellmesberger

The Zelkova Quartet

Caroline Pether violin 1
Rhiannon James viola

Simram Singh violin 2
Rachel Shakespeare cello

The **Zelkova Quartet** was formed at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester in 2010. The Quartet won the Christopher Rowland Ensemble of the Year Prize (2012), the RNCM Hirsch Prize (2012) and RNCM Nossek Prize (2011). In April 2012 Zelkova were the RNCM representatives in the National Cavatina Intercollegiate Competition where they were awarded Second place. 2011.

Caroline Pether began her violin studies at the age of 5 and later went on to study at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester with Professor Wen Zhou Li, who is also her current teacher at the Royal Northern College of Music.

Caroline reached the string semi-finals of BBC Young Musician of the Year in 2008 and won the Chandos Young Musician of the Year competition 2008. In 2011 she was one of the RNCM Concerto Competition winners and as a result performed the Sibelius Violin Concerto in the Bridgewater Hall in July 2012 with Yan Pascal Tortelier

Caroline plays an Antonius and Hieronymus Amati violin made in 1595, generously loaned to her by the RNCM.

Simran Singh has been playing the violin since the age of 6. During her time at home she became the Dyfed Young Musician and most notably won second prize in the Texaco Young Musician of Wales 2005, where she performed as soloist with the Cardiff Philharmonic.

Simran gained a place at Chetham's School of Music where she studied with Jan Repko. During this time she was part of the Tanaka and Pether Quartets, performing in venues including St John Smith's Square, London. She also led and co-led the Chetham's Symphony Orchestra under the conductors Sir Mark Elder, Paul McCreech and Jac van Steen, performing in venues such as the Bridgewater Hall and Lichfield Cathedral. Simran is also a member of the Dyfed Three Counties Orchestra, who recently toured Hungary.



Rhiannon James, originally from Cumbria, began studying the violin aged 7. After reaching grade 8 she decided that she would like to try the viola. She began learning the viola properly aged 14 when she joined Junior RNCM. She undertook her BMus studies at the RNCM in 2006, and recently completed her Masters, also at RNCM, in 2012 under the tutelage of Asdis Valdimarsdottir.

She toured China in 2010 with the 12 piece RNCM String Ensemble and has taken

part in 3 tours to Italy with the RNCM Symphony Orchestra. She now plays with the Manchester Camerata on a regular basis.. She made her Wigmore Hall debut earlier this year (along with Rachel!) playing Colin Matthews' Second Oboe Quartet. She plays on a modern French instrument made by Yann Besson and a William Retford Hill bow.

In December 2007 **Rachel Shakespeare** was awarded a scholarship to study Cello at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester to study with Eduardo Vassallo. Whilst at RNCM she sat Principal Cello in numerous orchestras and was also previously principal cellist of the National Youth Chamber Orchestra for 3 years as well as principal of the CBSO Youth Orchestra Academy

In 2012 she made her Wigmore Hall debut as part of the Colin Matthews Study Day and also performed at the Royal Opera House alongside 300 homeless people in an event hosted by Streetwise Opera.

Rachel is also passionate about education and outreach work and regularly raises money for charity and performs at Retirement homes and on Hospital Wards.



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