



# Tilford Bach Society



## Rivoli String Quartet

**Amelia Jones - violin**

**Helen Tonge - violin**

**Alexandra Gale - viola**

**Helen Downham - cello**

**28 February 2014**

**[www.tilbach.org.uk](http://www.tilbach.org.uk)**

**We especially thank an anonymous TBS member for very kindly sponsoring part of the cost of this concert**

## Programme

### **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

#### **String Quartet in F minor Op. 95 - Serioso**

*Allegro con Brio; Allegretto ma non troppo; Allegro assai vivace ma serioso; Larghetto espressivo - Allegretto agitato - Allegro*

"Written in 1810 for a small circle of connoisseurs and...never to be performed in public", Beethoven's 'Serioso' string quartet epitomises his bi-polar writing. The listener is jolted between intensely contrasting emotions; never more so than between the first and second movements with the move from F minor to the remote key of D major.

1810 was a period of turmoil both politically, and personally for Beethoven. Napoleon had invaded Vienna, greatly upsetting Beethoven (who had previously been a fan of Napoleon), and causing him to worry that the noise would destroy what was left of his hearing. In addition, his status as a commoner had plagued his love life, and in 1810 his proposal to Therese Malfatti (the supposed dedicatee of 'Für Elise') was met with rejection.

The first movement of Op.95 opens with an arresting unison statement, punctuated immediately with silence. But as early as the seventh bar, we have entered a world of serenity, although this is underpinned by tumult in the cello line and is broken by the return of the opening material. The movement continues in this vein, with these two worlds competing, until an extended period of aggression towards the end, which dynamically subsides, but remains unresolved.

The Allegretto ma non troppo which follows exudes lyricism, and any hint of anguish that appears is swiftly dispelled. The questioning suspended chord at the end of the movement is interrupted by the return of agitation and rhythmic unity which heralds the opening of the third movement. This is the movement for which the quartet is named 'serioso'. There is a curious marking of Allegro assai vivace ma serioso; curious because by tradition this movement should be either an elegant minuet or a quirky scherzo. This is neither, but is instead a return to the temperament of the first movement.

In terms of overall structure, the last movement is also somewhat unusual, beginning as it does with a slow section preceding the main Allegretto agitato (a strange marking in itself), and finishing with a light hearted scurry to the end, which wouldn't sound out of place in a Mendelssohn overture.

### **Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942)**

#### **String Quartet No.1**

*Presto con fuoco; Allegretto con moto e con malinconia grotesque; Allegro giocose alla Slovacca; Andante molto sostenuto*

A Czech composer, born to Jewish German parents, Schulhoff made a promising start to his compositional career before he had to interrupt it to fight in the First World War. Like so many other composers, he felt that the war turned humanity

and society on its head, and the artistic expression of its values could never be the same again. This included musical expression, and Schulhoff turned away from the overblown Romanticism of pre-war Europe towards different modes of expression. He became very interested in jazz, and many of the works he composed around the time of this first string quartet (1924) are very jazz oriented, although the quartet itself contains a fairly minimal influence. He also wrote such provocative and experimental pieces as the Sonata Erotica for solo soprano, and the Bass Nightingale for contra bassoon.

Around the turn of the century Mahler had started writing 'grotesque' movements, taking straightforward dances or tunes and distorting them, creating 'wrong' sounding waltz movements, for example. In the post war climate of revulsion at pre-war tastes, grotesquerie became a fashionable mode of expression, and one that Schulhoff made use of in the second movement of this quartet.

A common thread in many composers' work at the time was an increasing interest in the traditional folk music of their native countries. The third movement of Schulhoff's quartet takes us into a world of folk tunes and dances and gypsy virtuosity.

The last movement has a bleak atmosphere of war-torn desolation. At the end the two violins are directed to play 'abstractly' (as if with the numbness that follows suffering), while time, measured in quiet pizzicatos, can only carry on its own path. At the very end even this (or one's perception of it?) disintegrates.

## Interval

### Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

#### String Quartet

*Allegro Moderato, Très doux; Assez vif- Très rythmé; Très lent; Vif et agité*

Ravel was 28 and still a student at the Paris Conservatoire when he composed his only string quartet. It was a competition submission to the Prix de Rome, but the judges were unimpressed. Subsequent audiences have disagreed; it is now one of the most popular pieces in the string quartet repertoire. It is attractively fresh and colourful, with a fine balance between energy and poise, exuberance and delicacy.

There are structural similarities to Debussy's string quartet, written a few years earlier, including the return of first movement material throughout the quartet, and the extensive use of pizzicato in the second movement, including harp-like effects.

The first bar of the violin's opening melody returns in the slow movement, as though recalling another scene or time. In the finale, material from the first movement is transformed by putting it into a different metre (number of beats in a bar).

The finale begins with exhilarating bursts of energy, and continues with a feeling of each bar piling in on the previous one, due to having only five beats in a bar, rather than six. Faure, who was Ravel's teacher, and to whom the quartet was dedicated, didn't like this finale, but fortunately Debussy thought it was wonderful and told Ravel not to change a single note.

*Notes by Helen Tonge 2013*

**Tuesday 4 March 2014, 1-10 pm, United Reformed Church, Farnham**

**Bellaphonics - Vocal Quartet**

**Admission free, collection at the door**

## Rivoli String Quartet

The Rivoli Quartet was formed in 1999 at Manchester University under the guidance of The Lindsays, and takes its name from the music department building, the converted Rivoli cinema. After studying with Dr Christopher Rowland at the Royal Northern College of Music, (where they were awarded prizes in two RNCM chamber music competitions), they completed a Masters degree in String Quartet Performance at the University of Sheffield, coached by Peter Cropper.

The Rivolis perform throughout the UK, and in June 2009 held their own festival 'Schulfest', celebrating the music of the Czech Jewish composer Erwin Schulhoff, whose String Quartet No.1 appears on their debut CD. They won the 2006 Prix Ravel at the Académie Internationale de Musique Maurice Ravel, and were finalists in the 2006 Royal Overseas League Competition.

Helen and Helen have been in the quartet since the start, Amelia joined them in 2010, and Alexandra in 2012. They all have a variety of other work and interests outside of quartet.

**Amelia Jones** (violin) is the co-leader of Orchestra of the Swan, and freelances with various orchestras including Philharmonia and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. She has also recently set up a 'Musicland' teaching centre, based on the methods employed by her first violin teacher.

**Helen Downham** (cello) is currently on tour with the West End production of West Side Story, and enjoys writing and baking in her spare time. She has previously toured with 'Oliver!' as well as on various shorter term tours and has enjoyed a variety of orchestral concert and recording work.

**Alexandra Gale** (viola), also a keen baker, freelances with a variety of orchestras including BBC Philharmonic the Halle, and Manchester Camerata, and often seems to whizz off on exciting orchestral tours!

**Helen Tonge** (violin) also plays with Manchester Camerata from time to time, is currently leading Blackburn Symphony Orchestra, and last year performed the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with Tonbridge Philharmonic. She currently spends a lot of her time teaching violin, viola and various string ensembles.

**Saturday 29 March 2014, 7-30pm St Thomas on the Bourne**

**Mishka Rushdie Momen (piano)**

**Schubert and Chopin**

**Saturday 26 April 2014, 7-30pm St Andrews, Farnham**

**Southbank Sinfonia Baroque & Vox Musica**

**Bach, Biber and Buxtehude**

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