

NEW YORK WOODWIND QUARTET

January 26, 2017 – 7:00 p.m. – First Presbyterian Church, Joplin

Pro Musica

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963): Kleine Kammermusik

Paul Hindemith was one of the major figures of 20th century music. Amongst his many and varied accomplishments, he was concertmaster of the Frankfurt Opera, premiered the Viola Concerto by William Walton, reorganized music education and direction for all of Turkey and helped establish the Turkish State Opera and Ballet, developed a new theory system for tonal music that was not based on the classical diatonic model but rather on degrees of consonance and dissonance, and was a professor of composition at the Berliner Musikhochschule, Yale University, and the University of Zurich. He was born in Hanau, near Frankfurt, in 1895 and spent his early life in Germany. He was forced to leave by the Nazi regime, moving first to Switzerland and then on to the US, where he became a citizen in 1946. He later moved back to Switzerland and eventually home to Frankfurt, where he died in 1963. His compositional language moved from late romantic idioms through an expressionist period to what might be described as a contrapuntally dense neo-classicism, explored and developed with his Kammermusik works in the 1920's. His *Kleine Kammermusik*, written in a mere 5 days in 1922, is one of the first works in which his mastery becomes evident, and remains a staple of the woodwind quintet repertoire. You can hear in it many of the hallmarks of Hindemith's music – the humor in his parody of romantic forms in the minuet, a distinctive feel for color and blend, using both the piccolo and the muted horn to great effect, and a vibrant and vital rhythmic sense. Above all, his skill and knowledge of all the instruments is evident in his idiomatic writing, taking each to the limits, but never over the edge.

Pavel Haas (1899–1944): Wind Quintet, Op. 10

Pavel Haas (1899 – 1944), a Jewish composer born in Czechoslovakia, died in the concentration camp at Auschwitz in 1944 at the age of 45. He had already established a reputation (largely through his chamber music) as a fresh voice in contemporary European music before the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. A student of Janacek, he followed in his teachers footsteps by rooting his music in the folk-music of his people. We hear in the *Wind Quintet* (which dates from 1929) the modal patterns of Moravian music and strains of Jewish liturgical music. Although the *Quintet* shares some features with its most obvious antecedent, the wind sextet *Mladi* of Janacek, composed several years earlier, Haas speaks in a powerful voice that is captivating and original.

Why the music of Haas lay dormant for so long since World War II is a mystery. The *Wind Quintet* was published originally in Prague in 1934 but few copies survived the War. The editor, Lubomir Peduzzi, based the new edition (1991) on one of these copies which he found in the Moravian Museum in Brno.

The music itself is of the highest quality and is gradually finding its rightful place among the seminal woodwind works which emerged in Europe in the 1920's: the *Kleine Kammermusik*, Op. 24 of Paul Hindemith, first played in 1924; Leos Janacek's *Mladi* of 1924; Arnold Schoenberg's *Quintet* of 1925; the *Quintette en Forme de Choros* of Heitor Villa-Lobos; and Carl Nielsen's *Quintet* of 1928. These works opened an important new chapter in the history of wind chamber music, and paved the way for the modern wind quintet.

The Quintet rarely strays from minor tonalities, but is quite varied nonetheless. The first movement, Preludio, is based on a simple folk-like tune, but displays rhythmic (and notational) quirkiness one would associate with Janacek. The second movement, Pregheira, is the expression of a deeply felt prayer. The third movement, Ballo Eccentrico, is truly an eccentric dance featuring the Eb clarinet and the piccolo. In some ways the final movement is the most unusual of all, based on Moravian modalities, at times contemplative, but ending with an other worldly grandeur.

Felix Mendelssohn String Quartet in a minor, Op. 13 #2

transcribed by William Purvis

Felix Mendelssohn, born in 1809, was raised in an intensely intellectual family environment. His grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn, was a towering philosophical thinker of his time, and already at age twelve his father introduced the precocious Felix to the elderly Goethe, with whom he then spent 2 weeks. He also immersed himself in the works of Shakespeare, and subsequently composed his Overture to *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1825 at the age of 16. This was followed soon after by the exuberant Octet in Eb Major for double string quartet, notable not only for the remarkable maturity of the work composed at that young age, but also because it was the first important work for this ensemble. Of course, these are only highlights; by the time he composed the String Quartet in A Minor in 1827 at the age of eighteen, he had already completed well over 100 compositions.

Another manifestation of Mendelssohn's precocity was his fascination with and appreciation for the final string quartets of Beethoven when he first encountered them in the period immediately following Beethoven's death. This was unlike the prevailing view, concisely expressed by Ludwig Spohr, that the works were indecipherable. The String Quartet in a minor Op. 13 #2, Mendelssohn's first string quartet, shows a remarkable assimilation of the language and techniques of the final quartets of Beethoven in numerous ways.

Throughout much of the Quartet there is intensely contrapuntal writing, Mendelssohn incorporating what he learned from Bach, but also from Beethoven looking back to Bach. Several members of Mendelssohn's family appreciated the works of Bach, and an important moment in Mendelssohn's development came when he was given a score to the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1824.

Perhaps the clearest homage to Beethoven by Mendelssohn is the inclusion of text, although for quite different purpose for Mendelssohn than for Beethoven. Whereas the philosophical question Beethoven poses in his last string quartet, Op. 135, "Muss es Sein?" reflects the intense search for meaning of an older man, the question Mendelssohn poses, "Ist es Wahr?", shows the passionate yearning of youth. The quote is from the opening line of a song he had composed a few months earlier, "Is it true that you are always waiting for me in the arbored walkway?" Mendelssohn returns to this material to close the final movement, so providing a cyclical frame for one of the most passionate works in the chamber music repertoire.

I first began working on a transcription of this work for winds in 1989. During that time we were playing (and recording) Samuel Baron's stunning transcriptions of the Brahms String Quartet in a minor and Piano Quartet in G Minor. Inspired by Sam Baron, I had the idea that the intensely contrapuntal writing in the Mendelssohn could work quite well for winds, and also the Intermezzo, which is reminiscent of the wind writing in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Somehow it took me twenty five years to complete this project. I dedicate this transcription to Sam Baron - friend, colleague and mentor.