

Malion Music Festival Review

On February 8th, 2022 at 19:30 o'clock it was finally so far: The portal to the Orangerie in the Günthersburgpark in Frankfurt was opened and the 1st Malion Music Festival could begin. With a total of five concert evenings within one week, the four young musicians pursued a completely new concept. Unlike usual, only one work of the string quartet literature was the focus of each concert evening.

The first half of the evenings was characterized by a joint search for and approach to the composer and his work; in the second half, the respective piece of music was performed in its entirety. Far away from scientific lectures (except perhaps the "Great Fugue" op. 133, which demanded the highest concentration from the audience ;-)) the musicians together with the audience intuitively approached the respective pieces in a playful way, with improvisations and musical experiments, and could thus also give an insight into the daily rehearsal work of a professional string quartet.

Joseph Haydn started the evening with his String Quartet op.64 No.4 in G major. The motto of the evening was: "Exuberance and Innocence".

With the saying "Good composers can be played slowly" the Malion Quartett introduced an important tool of their joint rehearsal work right at the beginning of the evening, namely playing fast passages in slow motion. Here it was particularly impressive how the ductus of a passage to be played "fast, with joy!" in the original changed completely through slow playing. Suddenly one thought one was hearing a Bach chorale. In this way, the whole, impressive variety of "Haydn's" harmony opened up to the audience in many further listening examples and unexpectedly revealed existential and serious sounds of Haydn, who at first sight seemed so cheerful. In the further course of the evening, the genre-historical development of the minuet was considered, which was significantly influenced by Haydn. The quartet began with a very early minuet, including a dance interlude by the second violinist, in order to show the wide span from the dance piece to the great scherzo of a Beethoven quartet. At the appropriate point, the "minuet of the evening" was introduced with all its peculiarities, and the audience could sense with what ingenuity Haydn, who was self-taught throughout his life, gave each individual minuet of his work-rich oeuvre its very own character. The third movement, slow and lyrical, was reminiscent of an opera aria with orchestra. Here the four musicians spontaneously exchanged voices to show how much the expression of the movement would change if, for example, the cello took over the vocal part.

At the end of the moderation part, the Malion Quartet showed once again very vividly in the fourth movement how close "joy and sorrow" are to each other in life. Only a few seconds lie in Haydn's music between joyful third-note scales (played by both violins standing up with a leap of joy) and descending chromaticism that seems to have sprung from a Baroque oratorio.

But Haydn ends on a positive note, with humor, saying, "Since God has given me a merry heart, he will forgive me if I serve him cheerfully."

After a wonderful concert in the second part of the evening, some guests immediately secured more tickets for the follow-up concerts.

Under the motto "Jealousy and Remorse", the second evening featured Leoš Janáček's String Quartet No.1 entitled "Kreutzer Sonata" was on the program.

This rousing work is true "program music," which means that extra-musical content forms the basis of the composition. In this case, Janáček set to music the novella by the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy called: "Kreutzer Sonata". Driven by morbid jealousy, which increases more and more to hatred, the protagonist of the novella, Posdnyshev, commits murder of his wife.

The Malion Quartet dived deep into this stirring relationship drama with the audience that evening. Both the harmonic-sound potential of Janáček's composition and the literary content of the novella were explored together with the audience. In addition, Alex Jussow (1st violin) and Jelena Galic (2nd violin) repeatedly slipped into the roles of the two spouses, once again illustrating the full extent of the tragedy. Also on this evening, many sections of the composition were explained in detail by the musicians and parallels to Tolstoy's novella were made. Particularly impressive was a structural feature Janáček used in almost all four movements of his string quartet. To demonstrate the increasingly morbid jealousy, Janacek finds innumerable ways to heighten a motif that sounds innocent and playful at the beginning to the point of barbarism. To this end, the musicians demonstrated various compositional techniques and special timbres, such as playing sul ponticello to create an icy sound. They also made their own interpretative choices and demonstrated to the audience how the same passage would sound if played on different strings, for example, or if a fingering was changed. In this way, the audience was close to the process of creating their own interpretation. Janáček probably tried to take sides with his composition, in contrast to Tolstoy, and so the quartet invited the audience to see themselves in the role of the woman who faces her husband's change of heart in the form of the piece of music in disbelief, despair and in the end stunned.

An impressive evening!

For the third concert evening the Malion Quartet had chosen Ludwig van Beethoven's "Great Fugue" op. 133.

Together with the audience, the four musicians wanted to explore whether the chosen terms "consistency and freedom" are in a symbiotic relationship and can aptly describe the complex content of this movement, which already caused headaches for contemporaries at its premiere. The evening opened with a quote from Beethoven: "Making a fugue is not an art; I made dozens of them in my student days. But the imagination also wants to assert its right, and nowadays another, a truly poetic element must come into the time-honored form."

To put this quote to the test, the musicians first began to explore the musical genre of the fugue, as well as its development, together with this evening's particularly large audience. Beginning with a simple canon and examples from Bach's "Art of Fugue," the audience dove well-prepared into the beginning of the "Great Fugue," entitled "Overture."

It quickly became clear that Beethoven wanted to prepare the listener for something extraordinary with this introduction. In contrast to Bach and Haydn, in whom the fugue themes are unchanging entities that are led into different worlds but never transformed, Beethoven's fugue theme already appears in four different guises in the overture alone. This

introduction thus forms, as it were, the microcosm of the Great Fugue, for all four themes receive in the course of the movement large sections of their own of different musical character, in which the theme is constantly further transformed.

On this evening, there was once again a small excursion into rehearsal work, in which the quartet de-emphasized the so-called skeleton notes at particularly "note-rich" passages and simplified the rhythm somewhat in order to play an "Ursatz" (original movement) that holds the work together harmonically under all the fierce friction. Suddenly, some sections no longer sounded wild and dissonant, but something was discovered that recalled the simplicity and purity of a chorale. Thus, in the first part of the evening, the audience was led through the Great Fugue piece by piece by the musicians of the Malion Quartet with impressive professionalism. There was an incredible amount to discover!

After the intermission, the musicians began the concert part with the Cavatina from Beethoven's String Quartet op. 130 to show the audience what Beethoven's actual musical intention had been. For the great fugue had originally been the final movement of the six-movement string quartet op.130 and was only replaced by a more pleasing finale at the insistence of the publisher. Thus, through initial rejection, the great fugue received its present unique selling point under the opus number 133.

This evening was again highly interesting and rich in insights!

On the fourth evening the Malion Quartet dedicated itself to Claude Debussy's String Quartet op. 10 in G minor.

The musically farthest journey of the whole festival took the audience and the musicians to Indonesia under the motto "Wanderlust and Tradition".

First, the quartet played the 1st movement of the composition in its entirety so that the audience could fully immerse themselves in the world we associate today with French Impressionism. But how did the young Debussy find this very unique musical language? He visited the first "World's Fair" held in Paris in 1889, an absolute sensation at the time. He was particularly impressed by an Indonesian gamelan ensemble:

Such music had not been heard in Europe until then. How he incorporated this music, which is unusual to Western European ears, and foreign scales into his composition was explained very clearly by the four musicians, using many examples, both in theory and in practice. Since improvisation is also an essential feature of Indonesian music, the quartet demonstrated with their own improvisations on themes by Debussy how one can sense the mutability of motifs and melodies in this way.

However, not only these Far Eastern sounds, but also influences from Russian and German Romanticism opened up the possibility for Debussy to form his own personal style. In the further course of the evening, the musicians impressively demonstrated in what innumerable and most diverse sound worlds the main theme of the entire composition appears again and again as an *idée fixe*. In many places not recognizable at first hearing, it became quite clear when played in slow motion.

The concert after the intermission was a moment of happiness thanks to this introduction. Especially the 3rd movement, which is one of the most beautiful movements in string quartet literature and has almost become a second national anthem for the French.

The Malion Quartet played with high intensity, captivating the audience.

Im fünften und letzten Konzert des Malion Musikfestivals erforschten die vier Musiker zusammen mit dem Publikum

Antonín Dvořák's String Quartet No.12 in F major with the nickname. "American String Quartet".

The two terms that characterized this concert matinée were "home and new world". At the beginning of the moderation part, the musicians illuminated the key of the piece, F major, which could already tell the audience something about the atmosphere of the music, and showed other compositions that were also composed in F major, such as Beethoven's famous 6th symphony, which has the nickname "Pastorale". In Dvořák's string quartet, too, the "wonders of nature," the joy of life in the countryside, resound right at the beginning. The violins, reminiscent of fresh morning dew or the babbling of a small brook, the cello that sounds like a post horn in the distance or the viola that makes the listener picture a walker in the best of moods, enjoying all the wonders of nature. Dvořák himself also enjoyed the summer and the peace and quiet in the village of Spillville/Iowa and wrote the "American" Quartet in only two weeks! His friend Josef Jan Kovarik accompanied him during the entire stay in America and told: "The master's way of life in Spillville was something like this: Early in the morning he got up at four and went for a walk - to the creek or the river - and at five he returned. After the walk he worked, at seven he sat in church by the organ, then chatted a bit, returned home, worked, then went for another walk. Most of the time he walked alone and often no one knew where he was."

Much has been written about Dvořák's other inspiration for this string quartet: about Slavic melodies embodying his longing for home, about the spirituals of African Americans, the music of Native Americans. The four musicians also found a memorable passage in the first movement that is strongly reminiscent of the country music of the southern states, even though, chronologically speaking, this developed only after Dvořák's stay in America. To make this clear, violist Lilya Tymchyshyn unceremoniously presented "her" three fellow players with broadest Southern slang as a band, and together with her colleagues wonderfully imitated this typical country sound. The Malion Quartet itself unites various nationalities and thus has quite different musical roots.

The musicians showed what home can mean in a musical sense with folk songs from Germany, Croatia and Ukraine. A highlight of the matinée was the spontaneous vocal performance by the mother of the Ukrainian-born violist, who had traveled to the festival and lent a touching immediacy to the performance of the Ukrainian folk song. Thanks to the Malion Quartet's many listening examples and explanations, the audience was able to immerse itself in the world of Dvořák's music and to feel the longing for the homeland, but also the joy of the new world.

The crowning finale was then, of course, the second part of the concert, when the "American" Quartet was once again heard in its entirety.

In conclusion, it can be said that the concept of the 1st Malion Music Festival was a complete success. The audience's reactions were exuberant, and it was not uncommon for a guest to express that the special concept of these concerts made him feel connected in a very intimate way not only to the work in question, but also to the person behind the composition, and to view it in a completely new light. The introductions to the works,

musical experiments, sound examples and entertaining anecdotes from the composers' lives suddenly enabled the audience to perceive the music with very alert ears. Even "untrained" listeners said, "This is how you understand classical music, and then it's fun."
The musicians gladly took up the suggestion of a listener to also offer this concept as a radio format and approached DLF Kultur with it. With success.....!

On May 30th 2022 at 21:30 o'clock the Malion Quartett was to be heard in the broadcast "Einstand".
to hear. The contribution can be listened to in the media library.

From 13.3. - 19.3.2023 the 2nd Malion Music Festival will take place in the Orangery in the Günthersburgpark in Frankfurt.

All the latest information will be available soon on the website of the Malion Quartet.