

Preview

Cleveland Chamber Music Society: Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet to play formerly mechanized Mozart

by Daniel Hathaway



When the excellent Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet plays the last regular season concert of the Cleveland Chamber Music Society at Plymouth Church on April 30 at 7:30, they'll repeat the Pavel Haas *Quintet* they played here in 2010. The rest of the program will be devoted to music by Jean Françaix (*Quintet No. 1*), Czech composer Josef Bohuslav Foerster (*Quintet in D, op.*

95) and three curiosities by Mozart: the three *Fantasies* for mechanical organ, K. 594, K. 616 and K.608 as arranged by the quintet's flutist, Michael Hasel, who studied the organ before he took up the flute.

Mankind has been fascinated with producing music by mechanical means since the middle ages, and a fine collection of its most clever inventions can be seen and heard at the Museum Spielklok (Musical Clock Museum) in the Dutch city of Utrecht, ranging from street organs to recording grand pianos to a device that cleverly plays multiple violins that lean into a circulating bow.

Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven were all persuaded to write music for mechanical organs, Haydn for a real musical clock (thirty-two lovely miniatures), Beethoven (a potboiler, the *Battle Symphony*) for the “Panharmonium” built by Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, who invented the metronome.

In Mozart's case, his three *Fantasies* were commissioned by Joseph Deym-Müller, who owned a “cabinet of curiosities” and an “art cabinet” displaying statuary, figurines and busts” in central Vienna. When the famous Austrian Field Marshall Laudon died in 1790, he seized the opportunity for a new venture and acquired a showroom in the Himmelfortgasse to display a life-sized wax figure of Laudon in a “Mausoleum”. The *Fantasie K. 594* was intended as funeral music to accompany the display and made its debut in March of 1791.

More Mozart commissions followed when Deym took advantage of the death of the Emperor Joseph II and moved and enlarged his mausoleum into an “Elysium” to house both effigies. Though the two larger *Fantasies* were intended for a large mechanical instrument built by P. Primitivus Niemecz, librarian to Prince Esterhazy, that included flutes and a bassoon, the smaller one was probably played on a much smaller organ with only

two sets of pipes. In any case, the mechanisms resembled a Swiss music box except that pins on a rotating barrel attached to a worm gear operated valves that admitted air into pipes rather than striking metal bars. (Barrel organs in Handel's time existed both in churches and pubs in England, and extant cylinders pinned with movements of his organ concertos give important clues about contemporary ornamentation).

In Mozart's Vienna, organs served a very limited liturgical function and not much written-down music of any interest survives. Thus organists are delighted to have three significant pieces from Mozart's last year to add to their repertoire — if only they were playable by ordinary human beings (a practicality that didn't concern the composer when he put them into score).

Four-hand arrangements have brought the *Fantasies* more into the range of possibility, but the idea of arranging them for woodwind quintet is fascinating. The music is superb and Michael Hasel's arrangements will be fun to hear.

I'll be discussing the Mozart pieces and the Berlin Quintet's other repertoire in a 6:30 pm pre-concert lecture on April 30.

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