



CHAMBER MUSIC

Can You Name That Tune??

by Tom Rosenberg

When it comes to the great composers of classical music, most concertgoers and people who have studied an instrument can name most of the famous ones. But, if you go deeper into the subject, most of those same people don't know very many specific works by those composers. Even well-trained professionals are much more likely to know the orchestral repertoire of those composers more than the other things they wrote. The vast majority of both amateur and professional musicians cannot name most of the string quartets by the most famous composers or identify them when they hear them. For instance, my guess is that most people reading this only know a few movements of the nearly ninety Haydn string quartets, or the 20 string quartets of Mozart. Despite perhaps including the most monumental music ever conceived, even Beethoven's string quartet output is mostly unknown to many amateur and professional musicians. Things get even more unfamiliar when it comes to knowing the string quartets of the great nineteenth century composers including Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Dvorak and Tchaikovsky. Moving on into the twentieth century, there are great quartets by Debussy, Ravel, Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Kodaly, Bartok, Britten, Shostakovich and others.

Be honest...do you really know these pieces? Some readers may answer "yes," but most will need to say "no." Although it is perfectly fine not to know all of these works, I urge you to check them out. All of these composers wrote amazing, fantastic music for the string quartet! These days, it is easier than ever to get to know them thanks to the internet. Videos of great performances, both from the recent and not so recent past are on YouTube, as are countless great audio files of "old" recordings from the days before digital music. And of course, hearing these wonderful pieces live in concert is even better.

String quartets are probably the most well-known chamber music genre, and most "classical" music lovers do know at least some of this repertoire. But there are other chamber music works for four players

that are not string quartets, and many of them are fantastic pieces. In particular, the genre known as the piano quartet (violin, viola, cello and piano) has some very special works, yet these are generally even less known to both amateur and professional musicians. I hope that some readers do know some of these great works, and that this article will cause everyone who reads it to be curious to listen to all them. There aren't all that many by the great composers. It is my guess that to listen to them all would take less time than binge watching just one TV show that has multiple seasons.

So, in roughly chronological order, here they are!

- Mozart: Piano Quartet in G minor, K.478; Piano Quartet in E \flat major, K.493
- Schumann: Piano Quartet in E \flat , Opus 47
- Brahms: Piano Quartet in G minor, Opus 25; Piano Quartet in A major, Opus 26; Piano Quartet in C minor, Opus 60
- Dvorak: Piano Quartet in E \flat , Opus 87
- Faure: Piano Quartet in C minor, Opus 15

There are numerous others including works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Strauss, Saint-Saens, Walton and others, but the works listed above are the eight great ones. I urge you to spend some time getting to know them if you already don't.

There are also some other pieces for four players worth getting to know. Mozart wrote some wonderful quartets for flute, violin, viola and cello, and one for oboe and strings. Anton Arensky's Quartet in A major for violin, viola and two cellos, Opus 35 is a very good piece.

What about Quintets? Although not numerous, there are some great Quintets for 2 violins, 2 violas and cello. The really great ones include late works by Mozart: K.515 in C major, K.516 in g minor, K.593 in D major and K.614 in E \flat major. Brahms also gave us 2 wonderful Viola Quintets: Opus

88 in F major and Opus 111 in G major. Mozart and Brahms also wrote wonderful Quintets for Clarinet and String Quartet. Dvorak's Viola Quintet in E \flat , Opus 97 was written at about the same time as his famous "American" Quartet (Opus 96). Though not as famous, it is every bit as good or better. Schubert's Quintet in C major for 2 violins, viola and 2 cellos is considered by some to be the greatest piece ever written! But...if you heard it could you name it?

Then there are the great Piano Quintets, in other words works for string quartet and piano. There are really only a few truly great ones, but wow are they great. Schubert wrote his Quintet for Piano and Strings for a party and it includes a double bass and only one violin. Known as the "Trout" Quintet because the Second Movement theme is based on one of Schubert's songs of the same name, this work is beloved by those who know it. Schumann's Quintet in E \flat , Opus 44, Brahms Opus 34 Quintet in F minor and Dvorak's Opus 81 in A round out the best of the 19th century, though there are also excellent quintets by Franck and Dohnanyi. The best-known 20th century Piano Quintet is Shostakovich Opus 57.

Even less familiar to even many hard-core chamber music lovers are pieces for six players. Again, although quite a number exist, there are not that many really good ones and getting to know them is a treat. There are 2 great ones by Brahms (Opus 18 in B \flat and Opus 36 in G), one by Dvorak (Opus 48) and Tchaikovsky's Sextet known as *Souvenir de Florence*. Other notable works are by Strauss, Rimsky Korsakov and Schoenberg's hauntingly beautiful early work *Verklarte Nacht* (*Transfigured Night*).

When it comes to 8 players, only one work really stands out. Not only is Mendelssohn's Octet in E \flat a real crowd favorite and show stopper, he was only 16 when he wrote it! Other octets are out there including 2 movements by Shostakovich and rarely played but pretty good octets by Raff and Enesco. If you can identify those, you must be a world champion at *Name That Chamber Music Tune!* But so many of the works mentioned above are masterpieces. Pick just

a few and have fun getting to know them!

Tom Rosenberg teaches chamber music and cello from the Opus 1911 Music Studio in his home in Saint Paul. In addition to his

performing career, he also is on the faculties of the Carleton and Macalester Colleges and the McNally Smith College of Music, and is Artistic Director of The Green Lake Chamber Music Camp in Central Wiscon-

sin. He received the Master Teacher: Studio Award from MNSOTA in 2004, and has been named "Arts Educator of the Year" by the Michigan-Indiana Arts Council. www.tomrosenbergmusic.com ↗