

Malvern Concert Club Review
27 November 2014

There was something for everyone in the Zemlinsky Quartet's concert for Malvern Concert Club on 27 November. Although an authentically Czech ensemble, they take their name from the Austrian composer, Alexander Zemlinsky, whose Quartet No. 3 from 1924 formed the centrepiece of their programme. This piece explores some unusual string sonorities, and in this darkly expressive performance the atonal harmony (redolent of early Schoenberg or Berg) and the fragmentary melodic language all made perfect sense. Only in the finale did the mood lighten, brief references to Bohemian dances hinting at what was to follow, Dvořák's Quartet No. 10 (Op. 51). Here was airiness and light, the slow, 'Dumka' movement floating gently along with just a hint of Slavic nostalgia. After much applause and stamping of feet, we were treated to two encores, including Elgar's *Elegy* dedicated to the memory of the Club's former secretary, Catherine Freeman.

The enjoyment of music-making is evident in everything these musicians play, and each is an exemplary performer. I confess to being captivated from the first bar of Beethoven's 'first' quartet (Op.18, No.1): the elegant shaping of the phrases and the perfect balance, ensemble and tuning together promised a concert as magnificent as it turned out to be.

Congratulations to the Concert Club for bringing these wonderful musicians to Malvern – let's hope they come again soon.

Peter Johnson