

Understanding Classical Music Group

At the meeting in May the group continued to review the basics of classical music. The topic this month was Harmony. Prof Wright showed how harmony can be built by combining other notes at specific intervals with the tonic or home note leading to triads or chords in a specific musical key. To add further harmony, the chords can be varied to fit with the melody. A number of examples illustrated the points being made. Prof Wright then went on to demonstrate how the harmony can be extended by addition of a bass line, again with examples.

After coffee the group considered the idea that the different musical keys can each have a specific character – romantic, sorrowful, exuberant etc. The idea was first suggested in the early 1800s but not all authorities agree, some arguing that because the octave is divided into equal steps between the notes, all keys should sound the same. If this is so, why then do composers set their work in a specific key eg Beethoven symphony no.6 in F major? The group listened to some examples of the use specific keys but were unable to reach a decision.

The June meeting was devoted to a study of music from the Baroque period. Firstly, a video by Prof. Wright introduced J S Bach's choral music interwoven with a biographical account of the composer's life. This revealed some surprising facts; eg that Bach composed a new cantata every week for Sunday worship. After coffee an explanatory video described the background to and the compositional aspects of Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos.

The next meeting of the group will be July 28th when we will review the Classical period, particularly the music of Mozart.

Bill Heyes.