

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1954-55

Seventh Concert

THE NEW
EDINBURGH QUARTET

ROBERT COOPER

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

ANNE CROWDEN

JOAN DICKSON

with

MAXWELL WARD

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 24th FEBRUARY, 1955

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

I. QUINTET IN E FLAT MAJOR (K. 614)

Mozart
(1756-1791)

Allegro di molto
Andante
Menuetto
Finale: Allegro

With three exceptions Mozart's string quintets belong to the last four years of his life. The exceptions are quickly disposed of; one is a relatively unimportant original work for strings belonging to his youth, the other two are arrangements of serenades for wind instruments, that in C minor being a very great work. Of the four string quintets which together with the clarinet quintet form the finest part of the chamber music of Mozart's last years, this present quintet in E flat is the last. Those Heavenly Twins, the great G minor and C major quintets appeared in 1787. The E flat belongs to the April of Mozart's last year; it was preceded by the D major only four months previously. Both these latter quintets bear many distinctive marks of Mozart's last period, in particular a pre-occupation with contrapuntal technique and canonic effect, and a concentration and economy of material which tends to the elimination of even the simplest thematic contrast.

This is well seen in the first Allegro. Mozart is intent upon constructing wellnigh the whole of it out of the simple short trilled figure of its first subject, which persists like the measured tread of some elate dance of the Graces.

The Andante is a wistful romance, very similar in theme and feeling to the slow movement of the serenade "eine kleine Nachtmusik." The melody recurs again and again with ever fresh variations and elaborations, with changes of key, and so developed in the middle section as to form a marked contrast.

The Minuet serves to show that if you should happen to walk down stairs you may easily retrace your steps, and the trio makes it clear that what you really came down for was to dance with angels in the street outside.

Your first thought in the Finale will probably be that Haydn himself has come to pull your leg, but the fellow is astonishingly like the comedian from the finale of the E flat Symphony who

proved that a second subject was quite superfluous whilst he himself was present. Yet though we see through the disguise, it is ten to one that he will take us by surprise, when, in the middle of this rondo, he proceeds to put his legs about his ears and go off into a fierce fugato of elaborate complexity from which he makes a false re-entrance in the minor, on purpose, of course, that we may admire the delightful ingenuity by which he regains his proper footing.

2. QUARTET IN D MAJOR, OP. 64, No. 5

Haydn
(1732-1809)

Allegro moderato
Adagio cantabile
Menuetto: Allegretto
Finale: Vivace

INTERVAL

3. QUINTET IN G MAJOR, OP. 111

Brahms
(1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo, ma con brio
Adagio
Un poco Allegretto
Vivace ma non troppo presto

When Brahms in his fifty-ninth year produced this quintet, so exuberant in spirit and full of the zest of life, his friend Frau Herzogenberg wrote to him "He who can invent all this must be in a happy frame of mind! It is the work of a man of thirty." It does in fact look back a quarter of a century to the great G major sextet, which may well be considered the finest inspiration of Brahms as a young composer. But curiously enough it is the late quintet (with which incidentally Brahms for a while spoke of finishing his artistic life until the clarinet playing of Mühlfeld inspired him to the composition of the four works in which that instrument figures) which reveals the heroic ardour that might have been expected from the younger man, whilst the ethereal sextet possesses just that philosophic calm and serenity which might have been thought to be the gift of age. To make its heroic stature felt at the outset beneath the veritable sea of sound poured forth upon the other four instruments the 'cello, like the singers in Wagner's

Ring, needs to be born to the part. Much has been said and written as to a possible compromise and a sketch by Brahms shows that he contemplated allowing some measure of relief from the arduous task of devolving upon the 'cello in its high calling.

The Adagio, in the unexpected key of D minor, is a movement of nobly tragic utterance, remarkable for the continuity and concentration of its thought, without recourse to any contrast. One writer has summed it up thus. The theme " first appears in D minor. Later it is developed in G minor, and brought to a climax in the major mode of the original key. At the end recurs the touching minor form with a new and at once simpler and more poignant treatment of the continuation ; and at the very close it assumes a noble dark earnestness on the lowest strings of all instruments. And that is all."

That, however, is far from being all. For not the least wonderful feature of this movement is the persistent ambiguity of its key treatment, as subtle in fact as it is cumbersome to express.

The little scherzo and trio (G minor—G major) form one of those wistful, half pensive movements, near to the emotions of childhood, for which Brahms had on more than one occasion shown his genius. The antiphony of violas and violins in the major trio bring a tender smile of naïve humour, to which succeeds a shiftiness in the 'cello by no means so naïve. We may describe it as a tendency of dominant sevenths to forge the signature of augmented sixths, and then to confuse all by waiving the advantages and trying to live up to their better selves.

The finale is as exuberant in spirit as it is masterly in construction. For, if the exposition consists of a stringing together of a variety of thematic figures of several rhythms, yet this alone may be an act of genius if the succession is at once so spontaneous and yet controlled that the effect seems inevitable, and the mind is at a loss to distinguish variation from novelty. Add to this the inspiration of the oblique approach, and the vitality and vigour of the initial motive, and it will seem less astonishing that in this ever changing assemblage of themes the second subject should be suddenly telescoped to half its size while the room saved is used for dancing a veritable Irish jig. The vigorous triple counterpoint of the development prepares the way for the further development of the opening motive on a symphonic scale. After recapitulation the coda breaks away with a completely new and seemingly Hungarian dance tune about which Sir Donald Tovey's observation is apt. " The phrases reel down in bacchanalian irregularity to explain themselves with impudent assurance as connected with the main theme by ties as intimate as a borrowed visiting-card."

S. T. M. N.