

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1955-56

Fourth Concert

THE NEW
EDINBURGH QUARTET

ROBERT COOPER

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

ANNE CROWDEN

JOAN DICKSON

Additional Violoncello :

IAN HAMPTON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 24TH NOVEMBER, 1955

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

I. STRING QUINTET IN G MINOR, Op. 37, No. 2

Boccherini
(1743-1805)

Allegro con un poco di moto
Adagio
Tempo di Menuetto
Finale: Allegro

Luigi Boccherini, born at Lucca in 1743, was a precocious violoncellist, who proved himself one of the foremost virtuosi of that instrument in the second half of the eighteenth century. But it was only for a brief period that he toured as a concert artist associated with Filippo Manfredi (pupil of Tartini). His successes in Paris in 1768-69 led to his appointment at the Spanish Court where his true patron was the Infante Don Luis. (The Prince of Asturias was himself a violinist so vain of the interest that ought to belong at all times to the first violin part that he once threw the wretched composer the length of the room as a milder alternative to pitching him out of the window!). He served in Spain until 1785. For some years thereafter he held an appointment at the court of Frederick William II of Prussia (the royal 'cellist for whom Mozart composed his last three quartets), then returned to Spain where after a few years he found a patron in Lucien Bonaparte. He died in penury at Madrid.

Until very recently the world has been content to record in musical dictionaries that this prolific composer wrote 113 string quintets using two violoncelli, 12 quintets with two violas (his last, and generally accounted his finest, string quintets), 12 pianoforte quintets, and 102 string quartets (not to mention many trios, duets and other chamber works), 20 symphonies (of no great value), a *Stabat Mater* and a 'cello concerto. Having said as much, people have been content to enjoy the very effective 'cello concerto and (in the 1920s) went mad over "the Boccherini Minuet," all but very few ignoring the fact that that Minuet comes from the double-'cello quintet in E, Op. 13, No. 5, and that it might be worthwhile to explore some of the other movements from the 113 quintets! Today things are a little different—recent recordings include three string quintets, two quartets, a sextet, two pianoforte quintets and a few other works. But, since "the" violoncello concerto is only one of five, it would be a service worth performing to make the others available.

One need not be a Haydn or a Mozart to be somebody! The fact that Boccherini is a much smaller personality does not mean that he had not very considerable originality and charm. The romantic period was not likely to be interested, and it only needed a few trite remarks such as Puppa's "Boccherini is the wife of Haydn" and Spohr's "This is not music at all" for all this body of highly individualistic chamber music with its novel experiments in colouring to be left in the lexicographer's lost property office.

But Boccherini had something more than polite style and charming melody in his makeup, and this present quintet has been selected to show him in a serious mood, where pathos and smouldering fires of anger are more in evidence than social graces.

2. QUARTET IN F. MAJOR (Op. 135)

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegretto
Vivace
Lento assai, cantate e tranquillo
'Der schwer gefasste Entschluss': Grave—Allegro

When Beethoven headed the last movement of this his last quartet with the epitaph "The difficult decision," quoting its two main motives labelled as question "Must it be?" and answer "It must be," he seems to have posed a problem far more troublesome than any of Elgar's enigmas! Some, supposing Beethoven in his incipient last illness to have meant and known this to be his last work ('though in fact a new alternative finale to the Op. 130 quartet was written after this), look upon this question and joyously resolute answer as signifying the composer's decision as to how he shall bring himself full circle and say his last say. Others tell tales of the landlady's bill to be paid—the last movement must be written to raise the wind, or of an importunate request for a Beethoven quartet 'in the parts'—"must he pay for it?" "he must!" To my thinking it is quite irrelevant to this music that Beethoven was ill and unusually difficult, in one of his 'naughty boy' moods (as one writer puts it) or in need of cash, when he set about writing this work. The simple fact remains that the finale poses a question (words or no words) urgently and in great perturbation of spirit, and answers it resolutely and joyously, and at the last tiptoes to Elysium with a final shout of exultation as the curtain falls. Whether this is autobiographical or no is of no real account. The only autobiographical significance is that the whole quartet is the aftermath to the three great quartets, Op. 132, Op. 130 and Op. 131—in relation to these the whole work is an epilogue. It has been said that 'its imaginative significance is infinitely less' than that of the other late quartets. I cannot accept this at all. It achieves something not less but quite different from their profound and richly varied sphere of thought and emotion.

In the C major, Op. 59, No. 3, Beethoven began from the point of sheer void, nothingness, and answered this by seizing with exhilaration upon motifs and formulae that are more normally associated with the final celebrations of a spirited allegro. Here there is no mystery in the starting point, but one must recognise that the opening Allegretto presupposes that one has already travelled to such a level of spiritual exaltation as one reaches, for example, in the last variation of the Diabelli, or found grace in the benediction of the A major Andante of Op. 131. It is not a case of 'all passion spent' but all transfigured. Can the gods be bothered with landladies' bills, or with musical analysis? They laugh for sheer joy.

INTERVAL

3. QUINTET IN C MAJOR (Op. 163)

Schubert
(1797-1828)

Allegro ma non troppo

Adagio

Scherzo: Presto—Trio: Andante sostenuto

Allegretto

It is difficult to restrain emotion in speaking or writing upon this wonderful quintet, Schubert's supreme instrumental work. Not many months before he died Schubert heard a performance of the Beethoven C sharp minor Quartet (Op. 131), which moved him so deeply that he was quite beside himself. That same autumn he composed this great work (and his last three great pianoforte sonatas)—yet he never heard it played, and indeed it was first performed only about 22 years after his death and published a few years later still. It was this quintet which inspired Brahms to compose his great sextets and quintets—indeed Brahms' Pianoforte quintet was first conceived for strings only exactly upon this model. Certain comments are obvious—that Schubert favoured the double-'cello ensemble employed by Boccherini rather than the Mozartian model with two violas; that a second 'cello means the addition not merely of another bass but of an instrument which is free to be used throughout its whole range and, in particular, in its tenor register. But Boccherini knew nothing of the richness of such an ensemble, nor dreamt for one moment of such visions as are here unfolded. When all is said and done, verbal comments are as clumsy and superfluous here as marginalia are beside the perfection of a poem of Keats. The only worthy commentary lies here and there in some of the finest of Schubert's other music. Thus the slow movement of Schubert's last (B flat) sonata is analagous to, though less profound than, the E major Adagio here—for this moves from perfect tranquillity to the extreme of anguished emotion—a disturbance of spirit analagous to, but yet more searching than, that from which the confident gaiety of the finale marches forth in the Octet. Elsewhere than here one may find a trio section in serious mood contrasting with a scherzo of unfettered happiness, but the Andante sostenuto here is quite unique in its depth of emotion. In rhythm, tempo of thought and, indeed, in spirit itself, we are removed on the instant from the superb triumph of a symphonic scherzo to quite another sphere of human existence.

One feels that the whole of Schubert is enshrined in this work. If there is one thought that will linger long in the mind's ear after the day is done, it may well be that undying melody of the first movement which comes to us in the magic moment when by simply turning upon the heel (or upon a single note) we look upon a new horizon in utter quietude.

S. T. M. N.