

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1955-56

Eighth Concert

THE NEW
EDINBURGH QUARTET

ROBERT COOPER
ANNE CROWDEN

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN
JOAN DICKSON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 1st MARCH, 1956

At 7.30 p.m.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

1. QUARTET IN E FLAT, Op. 33, No. 2

Haydn
(1732-1809)

Allegro moderato, cantabile
Scherzo : Allegro
Largo sostenuto
Finale : Presto

It was the appearance of Haydn's Op. 33 (six quartets) in 1782 which suggested to Mozart the idea of writing the six quartets which he dedicated as a tribute to Haydn. Nearly a decade had elapsed since either composer had last used this medium. In 1773, Haydn's justly famous Op. 20 (the so-called "Sun" Quartets) had been seized upon by the youthful Mozart (then aged 17), who immediately wrote a set of six very remarkable though immature quartets (K.168-173) strongly influenced by and in many respects painstakingly modelled upon Haydn's great examples.

Haydn's Op. 20 was in many respects a more impressive achievement than his Op. 33. There is nothing here of the stature or depth of feeling of the F minor (Op. 20), and all concern with large-scale fugal finales has given place to the nimble wit of somewhat slight presto movements of the rondo type. The character of the Op. 33 set is best summed up in Tovey's words as "the lightest of all Haydn's mature comedies." The set has been named the 'Russian Quartets' because of their dedication to the Grand Duke Paul. Another name applied to them is "Gli Scherzi," for the reason that all the minuet movements are headed 'scherzo,' a distinction not markedly apparent to the listener either in tempo or in thematic content. Nevertheless, this E flat quartet is 'The Joke' *par excellence*, for at the end (if indeed there is an end) of the gay Presto Haydn leads us up the garden path—and this particular garden path leads to infinity. It is wise to reserve applause until one is quite sure one has reached that point!

2. QUARTET IN F MAJOR, Op. 59, No. 1

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro
Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando
Adagio molto e mesto—
Allegro (Theme Russe)

Beethoven's three quartets (Op. 59), composed in 1806, were dedicated to Count Rasumofsky, Russian Ambassador to the Austrian Court, in whose house they received their first performance.

The largeness of design and of the musical thought that inspires it is immediately apparent in the great sweep (of 19 bars length) of the initial theme which mounts from the dolce cantabile of the violoncello to the peak of a tutti fortissimo. Everything is roomy and large—the transition, the second subject and, above all, the development which opens as though repeating *da capo*, but opens out into new territory of immense breadth which embraces an unforeseen fugato derived from a figure of the main theme. Copy-book analysts might quarrel as to the precise point of the recapitulation for the reason that it is reached by a resumption of the subsidiary part (20th bar) of the main theme before it actually happens; but for the listener there is no doubt at all, when the grip of fortissimo is released.

The Allegretto Scherzando is a scherzo of an unusual type which Beethoven first explored in the C minor Quartet of Op. 18. Commentators have tended to emphasise the fact that it is a scherzo in sonata form and one writer has claimed that nearly everything is duplicated in it—two first subjects, two transitions! But anyone with a grain of humour (or of commonsense, which is or ought to be the same thing) will perceive that the delicate impertinence of such a scherzo theme has an inalienable right to all the privileges of expected and unexpected re-entry that belong to a rondo, whether or no it bothers about rondo-form. And, if there is both delicate humour and tremendous latent power in the initial drum-tapping of the 'cello, there is also in it the capacity to evoke a new lyricism as it approaches the recapitulation.

The gloriously sustained Adagio is a movement of profound sorrow, but the emotion is much deeper and much richer than pure melancholy. At the last, it resolves not in any final cadence but on a tone of expectation which with the free spill of cadenza (or fantasy) bridges the way to the finale. This is based as a starting point upon a Russian folk melody announced by the violoncello. Folksong melodies are by nature designed to make for cumulative effect by repetition. Beethoven shows his realisation of that essential fact both in the E minor Quartet (Op. 59, No. 2) and also here. For, although this movement is in sonata form and for large stretches concerned with strenuous tutti utterances, the coda, with its lingering thoughts, reminds us of the special effect made by the recurrences of this melodic theme.

INTERVAL

QUARTET IN G MINOR, Op. 10

Debussy
(1862-1918)

Animé et très décidé
Assez vif et bien rythmé
Andantino doucement expressif
Très modéré—Très mouvementé et avec passion

This quartet, numbered I by the composer but the only one he wrote, was composed in 1893, four years after César Franck's great quartet in cyclic form, and ten years before Ravel's quartet. Debussy wrote no other chamber music until the last years of his life when he produced the three sonatas in a consciously new style. The quartet is contemporary with the famous "Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune," which marks the first full flowering of impressionism in Debussy's art.

Debussy was not within the entourage of Franck's pupils and disciples, and indeed many of the Russian nationalists such as Borodin were more congenial to his artistic outlook than were any contemporary French composers. Nevertheless, Franck's conception of cyclic form had a marked influence upon the structure of this quartet which in turn so clearly influenced Ravel. Debussy's second movement (the 'scherzo,' though not so named) is pervaded by an ostinato motif (lyrically expanded to form the contrasting section) which is a compact variation of the decisive main theme of the first movement, and in both forms this material plays a very prominent part in the finale. Only the exquisitely beautiful slow movement (Andantino) in D flat major lies altogether outside this associative thematic territory. But, if I have emphasised the origin of Debussy's thematic and formal structure, it should be added that the style and the harmonic language are essentially personal to Debussy, and the work justly ranks as one of the most original and historically most important works in the chamber music of the last seventy years.

S. T. .M N.