
University of
Edinburgh
Concerts

1970-71

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET
Miles Baster, Austin Patterson
Victor Manton, David Edwards

MARGARET R. MONCRIEFF *oboe*

Thursday 14 January
Reid School of Music

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NIELSEN 1865–1931

Quartet in F major, opus 44

Allegro non tanto e comodo

Adagio con sentimento religioso

Allegretto moderato ed innocente

Finale: Allegro non tanto, ma molto scherzoso

BLISS b. 1891

Quintet for Oboe and Strings

Assai sostenuto — moderato

Andante con moto

Vivace

Interval

SCHUBERT 1797–1828

Quartet in G major, opus 161

Allegro molto moderato

Andante un poco moto

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Allegro assai

Nielsen's Quartet in F major, his fourth and last, was written in 1906 when the composer was working on the opera, *Maskarade*. It was originally called opus 19 and subtitled *Piacevolezza* ('charm' or 'pleasantness'), but this name was removed when the quartet was later revised for publication as opus 44. In this work Nielsen is less concerned with the intensity and eloquence of the third quartet or the second symphony, both of which preceded it by a few years; instead, we find the gaiety of *Maskarade*, or the humour and restful contentment of the *Sinfonia espansiva*, written five years later. Only in the slow movement is there a trace of declamatory intensity and taut counterpoint.

Nielsen was enamoured of picturesque tempo markings, and in the original version the first movement was marked *allegro piacevole ed indolente*. This described aptly the relaxed theme which opens the movement; it flows effortlessly away from F major, to cadence in G flat major in the ninth bar. The

form is that of sonata rondo, so that this theme is reprised after the second subject, a comical theme of repeated notes and *acciaccature*. Since most of the development is based on the second subject, all episodes contain the same material, and the movement has a distinctly strophic air. The coda contains a typical pleasantry: the melody played by the upper instruments fades away as it is about to cadence, leaving the 'cello with an off-beat accompaniment figure, as though he had lost his place and been left with a few bars to play!

The slow movement, *adagio con sentimento religioso*, centres on a chorale-like melody, which is varied, fragmented, and treated contrapuntally, to form a vibrant and dramatic piece of great variety. The treatment recalls Beethoven's *Heiliger Dankgesang*, but the sentiment is less plaintive, warmer and more direct.

This movement closes in C major, and the third movement, *allegretto moderato ed innocente*, is in A minor. Its lazily strolling melody is interrupted by outbursts of scrubbing semiquavers. The movement is in a kind of *Liedform*, with a short contrasting middle section in F major.

The opening of the last movement, *allegro non tanto, ma molto scherzoso*, is a gay and childlike tune, typical of Nielsen. It leads to a more expressive melody in the dominant; since both these sections are later reprised, it is possible to envisage a kind of sonata form. In place of the development there is a fugato, very chromatic and only vaguely recalling the second subject, though this subject is later heard in stretto. A short cadenza for solo violin, played on the G string, heralds the recapitulation; here the first subject is in the 'wrong key', in fact in the dominant, but it is reprised fairly literally, the second subject flowing easily after it in the tonic key. In the coda, a reference to the first subject closes the quartet in an atmosphere of sunny good humour.

The Quintet for Oboe and Strings by Arthur Bliss was commissioned by Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, and first performed in Venice in 1927, Leon Goossens being the oboist. It was received with acclaim, and seemingly with relief, for Bliss had threatened to become a revolutionary with early works like the *Colour Symphony*. This quintet marks the arrival of his mature style, the style of the *Pastoral* for chorus, flute, drums and strings, for instance; though key signatures are not used and there is a constant tonal flux, euphony is never relinquished

and the harmony constantly reveals its roots in the music of Ravel and Delius. The oboe part is concertante, very much a solo part, exploiting all kinds of oboe effects, warm and florid melody, pastoral rhapsody, brilliant fast staccato.

At the outset of the first movement, the two violins have a tranquil and ecstatic figure in thirds, from which most of this movement is to be developed. The oboe also has this figure on its entry, but later plays a contrasting theme beginning with a fall of a minor ninth, with pizzicato accompaniment. In an agitated middle section the original theme is heard at a faster speed; there is an *allargando* climax, and the second theme is reprised. The coda is in soft melting chords, and the oboe is left suspended and alone, with the opening figure of the movement.

The slow movement is in three-part aria form, the reprise being quite free, and the middle section a piece of *grotesquerie*, with an ostinato accompaniment, pizzicati, and continual semitone clashes. The main section is a lyrical tune, warmly harmonised and increasingly florid. There is a characteristic coda; the oboe plays soft 'shepherd's pipe' figures while held string chords add a sultry fragrance.

The last movement is a brisk jig. Its unison opening is abstract and chromatic, but the jig rhythm soon becomes an accompaniment to a more sustained oboe melody, in two-four time. At last abstraction disappears; the oboe plays the tune of 'Connelly's Jig', from Joyce's collection of *Old Irish Folk Music*. The remainder of the movement presents a rhythmic breakup; the strings play at half speed while the oboe interpolates fragments at the original speed, or an irregularly accented accompaniment contradicts the jig metre. Final brilliant oboe cadenze restore the buoyancy of this Irish jig, composed by a pupil of C. V. Stanford. R. M.