

words. The second movement, a soft funeral march, is pensive rather than tragic, though it embraces moments of passion and majesty; its theme may be a Swedish folksong, heard by Schubert at the house of the Fröhlich sisters. The scherzo begins canonically; it has the frankness of a rustic dance, which is however heard at a distance. The big, loosely built finale alternates two rhythms in a single tempo, a brisk 6/8 and an *alla breve* in which the bows bounce in a continuous *spiccato*. Within its copious boundaries is to be found a quotation from the slow movement; since this is reprised near the end in the tonic minor, it is almost the last thing to be heard in the work, furnishing the mixture of sadness and gaiety so beloved of the *Biedermeierzeit*. R.M.

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*Next concert: Thursday 2 December*

THE REID ORCHESTRA  
EDWARD HARPER *conductor*

BARTOK *Dance Suite*

DALLAPICCOLA *Variazioni*

BEETHOVEN *Symphony no. 2 in D, opus 36*

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# EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY CONCERTS

1971-72

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

Miles Baster Austin Patterson  
Michael Beeston David Edwards

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 13 January 1972

1972

DVORAK 1841-1904

String Quartet in D minor, opus 34

*Allegro*  
*Alla Polka. Allegretto scherzando*  
*Adagio*  
*Poco allegro*

Dvorák commenced this work in December 1877, less than a week after hearing he had won the Austrian State Prize for the third time. It may well have been written as a token of gratitude to Brahms, who as a member of the jury recommended the award. Dvorák dedicated his new work to the older musician, and their warm and lasting friendship dates from this time.

The frequent signs of melancholy seen in this quartet were most probably due to the death of the composer's two children a few months earlier. The opening bars of the work recall the mood that prevails in *Gretchen am Spinnrade* and also the texture of the beginning of Schubert's A minor quartet, which is not surprising since the Czech composer was a great admirer of Schubert. It will be noticed that the second subject theme of Dvorák's first movement grows out of two bars of his main theme. The development, which commences with a magical and wholly unexpected shift of key, possesses considerable power and conviction. A stormy passage in the earlier part of the exposition is missing from the recapitulation, but returns in the Coda to provide this with a spirit of defiance.

In this work Dvorák followed the example of Fibich in making that favourite Czech dance, the polka, serve as the scherzo in a string quartet. Dvorák's dance is whimsical, and is followed by a flowing trio in rapid triple time. In the slow movement, and for the second time in this work, a contrasting theme springs from a fragment of the theme with which the Adagio opens. There is considerable imagination displayed in the textures, colouring and use of countermelody in this movement, and in the Coda the first movement's second subject is recalled. The work ends with an energetic and animated sonata form finale, in which there is no ultimate alleviation of the tragic mood. J.C.

BRITTEN b.1913

Quartet No. 2 in C, opus 36

*Allegro calmo senza rigore*  
*Vivace*  
*Chacony. Sostenuto*

Britten's second string quartet was composed in 1945, four years after his first. In this work Britten's expertise in handling of instrumental sonority is combined with his flair for finding original ways of handling a musical style rooted to a greater extent in traditional tonality than that of many of his contemporaries. The rising tenth with which the work begins is the most prominent feature of the material of the first movement. Indeed, the first subject group of three short themes is expounded over drone-like double-stopped tenths. The second subject group includes the placing of different fragments of the main ideas in counterpoint with each other, and in so doing achieves a more developmental character than is customary at this point. A series of free improvisatory passages based on fragments of the main material comprises the traditional development section, which is followed by an extraordinarily compressed recapitulation which assumes a structurally climactic function by sounding all three themes of the first subject group in counterpoint with each other. A more fragmented, reflective coda completes the movement.

The tense and intermittently turbulent second movement contains the traditional ternary features of the 'scherzo' though with varied recapitulations and a strong thematic interrelationship between scherzo and trio (i.e. the main idea based initially on a short falling scale).

Britten's interest in the music of Purcell would appear to be a factor in his choice of the form of the *Chacony* as his finale. The nine-bar theme announced at the outset is followed by twenty-one variations which are grouped into four sections, divided from each other by solo cadenza for cello, viola and first violin respectively. Britten has written 'The sections may be said to review the theme from the (a) harmonic, (b) rhythmic, (c) melodic and (d) formal aspects'. The rising fourths and falling fifths which characterize the theme can be heard clearly throughout much of its subsequent treatment. Altogether this finale represents one of Britten's finest achievements in the field of instrumental music. L.C.

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INTERVAL

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SCHUBERT 1797-1828

Quartet in E flat, D87

*Allegro moderato*  
*Scherzo. Prestissimo*  
*Adagio*  
*Allegro*

'It would be a better idea if you were to concentrate on quartets other than mine, for there is really nothing in them.' Schubert wrote thus in 1824 to his brother Ferdinand, for his boyish essays were still being played within the family. We may choose to disagree with the composer; this quartet in E flat, probably written in November, 1813, has that fluent lyricism which we call 'Schubertian', although this work may often remind us of other figures, especially Mozart, Beethoven and Spohr. The kinetic pattern of the first movement consists of an alternation of simple homophony or unison with various accompaniment figures; like the composers mentioned, Schubert chooses to begin with a simple homophonic statement, a kind of unalloyed essence of the music, played here very softly. The continuation is more song-like, even generating light-footed triplets in the transition section, and the subsidiary material begins with that moment of tender lyricism which used to be oddly titled 'second subject'. The closing figure recalls the transition, a Haydn-esque device. The bounteous flow of inspiration is already evident in the music of this sixteen-year-old, but thematic control has not yet been learnt; the development scrambles back to the tonic with a few snatches of the transition figure, and the recapitulation, *mutatis mutandis*, is an almost exact counterpart of the opening. The brief scherzo is perhaps a reminiscence of the minuet in Mozart's E flat quartet, K.428. Its trio is a *musette*, with the bagpipe drones that have characterised trios for three centuries. If we have so far been reminded of Mozart by this youthful work, the slow movement will arouse other echoes. Its harmony is chromatic, but unlike the pregnant or heart-rending chromaticism of Mozart; this is the limp, cloying but pretty harmony of Ludwig Spohr and John Field. The mature Schubert was to replace this with a shapely clarity of harmonic movement which was his special creation. The last movement of this quartet is in sonata form, again with a rudimentary development section and almost literal recapitulation. Its main subject is a paraphrase of that of the first movement; more prophetically, the music alternates two rhythms, for the progressive accretion of triplet groups against the duple metre effectively leads to six-eight time, with several dancing figures much like the final movement of the E flat piano trio, played at a University concert last term. R.M.