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EDINBURGH
UNIVERSITY
CONCERTS

—
1972-73

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

Miles Baster Austin Patterson
Michael Beeston David Edwards

RONALD MORRISON
baritone

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piano

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IVES 1874-1954

String Quartet No. 2

Discussions

Arguments

The Call of the Mountains

The music of Ives has made enormous headway during recent years and has exerted a very considerable influence on younger composers in this country and America. Yet opinions of his stature and place in 20th century music still vary considerably, simply because more than any other composer of his time he faces us with a fundamental challenge—a challenge to our ideas of what music ought to be, to our concept of logic and continuity in music, to professionalism and many of the basic premises on which our musical education depends. He is in fact the true father of present-day experimentalism.

His challenge arises out of two main factors, his isolation and his Universalist philosophy. Just as he saw social problems, his business life and his personal life in the light of his philosophy, so he actually shaped his music in accordance with the same philosophy; and this is the basic reason for the most baffling aspect of his music—the multiplicity of ideas and events and the piling up of apparently irrelevant matter. In his Essays he gives a clue to this connection—

“Nature loves analogy and abhors repetition and explanation. Unity is too generally conceived of, or too easily accepted as analogous to form, and form as analogous to custom and custom to habit.”

Ives believed that music, like other truths, should not be immediately or even ever understood, but that there must always remain some further element yet to be disclosed. The classical tradition believed in fulfilment (the idea so brilliantly expounded in Tovey's lectures, *The Integrity of Music*); Ives believed in lack of fulfilment. So his final and most ambitious work, which he planned and sketched for many years—the *Universe Symphony*—was never meant to be finished. In more recent years we have seen the realm of music invaded by science; in Ives it is invaded by philosophy, and this invasion has produced music full of fascination for young and contemporary minds.

The second quartet was composed in sections between 1907 and 1913 while the composer was working on several other compositions. As is clear from the titles of the movements, the composer attempts to make each of the instruments independent melodically and rhythmically, and this results in much polytonality. There is space here only to give a brief outline of the programme behind the music.

Ives calls the work—“String Quartet for four men who converse, discuss, argue (politics), fight, shake hands, shut up, then walk up the mountain side to view the firmament.” A number of remarks were also written into the manuscript and addressed to ‘Rollo’, a character probably taken from a series of contemporary books for genteel New England boys. The second violin is in fact Rollo, conservative, timid, and rather dismayed by this new-sounding music. He is given pretty little tunes to play, one of which is labelled *Andante Emasculata*. Rollo makes futile attempts to reconcile his three quarrelling friends, but his polite phrases are rudely interrupted. At the end of the second movement, the composer instructs the first violin—who sounds as if he is tuning up his instrument—to play *Con Scratchy*, and the argument ends without resolution as they all play *Con Fistswatto*, all this being Ives's way of attacking the pundits and academics, as well as conventional music in general.

The independent polyphony, the polytonality, and the extreme rhythmic complication of the second movement in particular, all anticipate more sophisticated experiments of more recent years, and especially the music of Elliott Carter (whose second quartet will be heard later in the season). It is perhaps worth remembering that contemporary with this work in Europe were the first and second quartets of Schönberg and Bartók. K.L.

LEON COATES b.1937

Three Songs of Night, for baritone and string quartet

This work was composed in October 1967 for the Music Society of St Peter's College, Oxford, and first performed there in the following month. It makes use of three of Joyce's collection of short poems entitled *Pomes Penyeach*.

The first poem *Nightpiece* evokes a sombre nocturnal atmosphere, equating the patterns of the night skies with outlines of a cathedral, but a certain unease lies behind these spiritual thoughts, betrayed in such phrases as “night's sin-dark nave”.

The second poem, *A Memory of the Players in a Mirror at Midnight*, mocks the idea of real representation of love by mere actors; “They mouth love's language”.

Alone reflects Joyce's view of love as a mixture of the virtuous and the sinful, closing as it does with the words, “And all my soul is a delight, a swoon of shame”.

The musical argument of the first piece, *Moderato*, is based almost entirely on the first four notes E F E G which also appear in the second movement, *Allegro feroce*. However, this second piece features sequences of falling fourths rather more prom-

inently. A soft, wide-leaping melody winds slowly through the final song, *Andante*, appearing momentarily in diminution in the central bars.

BRITTEN b.1913

Songs and Proverbs of William Blake, opus 74

The first performance of this cycle was given by its dedicatee, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and the composer at Aldeburgh in 1965.

An atmosphere of resignation pervades this work, which is perhaps the most darkly coloured of Britten's vocal works. Six of the *Proverbs of Hell* provide a prelude and linking passages for settings of *Six Songs of Experience*. A final linking passage uses the words of an aphorism from *Auguries of Innocence*, while this set of poems also provides the words for the final song.

The songs are self-contained whereas the Proverbs develop continuously one musical idea. L.C.

INTERVAL

BARBER b.1910

Dover Beach

Like Walton, Barber may be described as a neo-romantic, and in America he is probably the most frequently performed of ‘serious’ composers. His appeal depends on qualities he shares with the great romantics, but like Walton again, he has his own unmistakable finger-prints and his music at its best is sincere, moving and never second-hand. He builds on the past and finds his own fulfilment in a manner diametrically opposed to the Ivesian approach.

His first success was this short setting of Matthew Arnold's poem, composed at the age of twenty and sung for the first time by Barber himself in a recorded version. The words, so meaningful to the Victorians in the dark days of the industrial revolution, have become a genuine source of inspiration to the sensitive young composer living in a great mechanised civilization.

The nostalgia, the protest and the escapism are all dominant features of American music of the period and we are reminded that much of Barber's very best music is to be found in his songs.

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WALTON b.1902

Quartet in A minor

Allegro

Presto

Lento

Allegro molto

This was Walton's second essay in the form (the first quartet dates from 1922 and was withdrawn after an unsuccessful performance at the ISCM in Salzburg), and was first performed in 1947.

It is one of the most 'classical' of Walton's works as far as its form is concerned and has a clear tonal design. The ideas themselves are entirely characteristic and one is often reminded of other Walton works, particularly of the First Symphony.

The first movement is in sonata form with a lyrical first subject and an agitated second theme very reminiscent of the First Symphony's scherzo. The long and masterly development contains a fugato (First Symphony again) and a beautifully varied recapitulation in which the first subject appears in augmentation.

The second movement is a remarkably concentrated Scherzo which repeats its first section and contains an extended development. Just a few bars serve as a recapitulation.

The slow movement is again in sonata form with a long-drawn melody on the viola (F major) and a second even more beautiful melody in A flat—again first heard on the viola. There is a slightly more agitated and thematically fluid middle section, and a highly wrought and elaborate recapitulation.

The finale is a Rondo with a contrasted second subject as well as two episodes.

K.L.

Next concert : Thursday 26 October

THE REID ORCHESTRA

MICHAEL TILMOUTH *conductor*

LEON COATES *piano*

MOZART Overture 'La clemenza di Tito'

TIPPETT 'Little Music' for strings

SCHUMANN Introduction and Allegro appassionato, Opus 92,
for piano and orchestra

WAGNER Siegfried Idyll

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 3 in E flat