

period of the opus 20 quartets and symphonies like the *Trauer* and the *Farewell*. Not surprisingly, most of the technical *gaucheries* of the first two masses have disappeared, but after his experiment on an altogether larger scale in the *Great Organ Mass*, Haydn returns here to the *missa brevis* style. He uses the solo quartet and choir in accordance with the Austrian tradition, rather like *concertino* and *ripieno* groups in a *concerto grosso*, with few extended (and no elaborate) solos but a good deal of interplay between the two contrasted groups. With a few exceptions, such as the somewhat primitive 'Amen' fugue at the end of the *Gloria*, much of the choral writing is in a simple chordal style which despatches the text with alacrity and places reliance upon the development of orchestral figuration to secure cohesion and continuity. That less admirable feature of the *missa brevis*, the telescoping of the text, has to be heard to be believed at the opening of the *Credo* which rivals an English catch in confusion if not in humour: simultaneously we hear from the sopranos 'Credo in unum Deum Patrem omnipotentem factorem Coeli et terrae', from the altos 'Credo genitum non factum consubstantialem Patri', from the tenors 'Credo Deum de Deo lumen de lumine Deum verum', and from the basses 'Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum Filium Dei unigenitum'. Austrian churches were cold in December and lengthy settings of the creed not suffered gladly.

The St Nicholas Mass strikes a mood of gentleness and serenity disturbed only occasionally by the stress of the minor tonality (in the 'Et incarnatus est' and *Agnus Dei* predictably, and rather oddly at 'in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis' in the *Gloria*). The first and last movements of the mass are set to the same music in a lilting 6/4 time, apparently influenced by the *pastorella* tradition. This feature has made the work popular in Austria at the celebration of midnight mass on Christmas Eve. M.T.

Next concert: Thursday 18 October

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

HAYDN Quartet in B flat, opus 76 no. 4

PETRASSI Quartet

BEETHOVEN Quartet in E flat, opus 74

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EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY CONCERTS

1973-74

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

Miles Baster Austin Patterson

Michael Beeston David Edwards

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 18 October 1973

HAYDN 1732-1809

Quartet in B flat, opus 76 no. 4

Allegro con spirito

Adagio

Menuetto and trio

Finale, Allegro ma non troppo

The six quartets of Haydn's opus 76 are contemporaneous with *The Creation*; they appeared in 1799. Perhaps it is not fanciful then, to allow the British nickname of this quartet in B flat—the 'Sunrise'—to remind one of that terrific moment in the oratorio: 'Let there be light'. Musical sunrises had, however, been part of the stock-in-trade of eighteenth-century music, and Haydn himself had written one as early as 1761, in the symphony called *Le Matin*. This quartet is not properly, such a sunrise; the name refers merely to the soaring character of its opening theme. Nevertheless there is good musical cause to think of *The Creation* in connection with this piece. The oratorio, superficially heroic and Handel-like, really marks the sunniest, most confident phase of Haydn's maturity; its limpid melody and sensuous instrumentation are really nearer to *opéra comique*. So it is with this quartet. The rigorous counterpoint of opus 20, the crisp wit of opus 33, the virtuosic marvels of opus 54, here resolve into a smoothness and *cantabile* which refuse to get excited even in the effortless finale, marked *mezza voce*.

The first movement achieves that variety of texture within unity of theme which was the classical ideal. It is imperative to digest the leader's opening phrase, which contains the whole material of the movement. First, a rising semitone; then a lyrical figure built around the triad; finally three detached rising notes—one, two, three. The transition immediately inverts and augments the semitone figure; then the three rising notes are heard in diminution, at quadruple speed. There is no new theme when the dominant key is established; instead, the original theme is turned upside-down, both with regard to its shape (more or less) and its position in the system—it is now played by the cello. The rest of the movement may be readily followed, all its figures being recognised as variants of the original three.

The slow movement, in E flat, is a song of heartfelt tenderness; its rapt pauses become even more meaningful when the theme returns in the minor mode. A *stretto* of this theme, and a touch of romantic chromaticism in the close, seem natural issues of its expressive train. The minuet preserves its Austrian peasant character, especially in the trio which is a *musette*, like so many

trios of classical music. The *musette* was a bagpipe but the string quartet naturally resembles more a hurdy-gurdy, the viola and cello the drones, the violins the fingered melody-string.

The finale promises to be something between rondo and variations, in Haydn's normal manner. But, after a minor episode and a return of the theme, there is a long *stretto*, ever faster, in which previous material is freely developed. R.M.

PETRASSI b.1904

Quartet

Allegretto comodo

Un poco allegretto

Presto

Vigorouso

Adagio

Petrassi's early works up to about 1932 were naturally influenced by Casella and Hindemith and may for want of a better term be described as neo-classical. Since that time through a long series of distinguished works, orchestral, choral and dramatic, the composer has been able to avail himself of many different aspects of twentieth-century style without for a moment sacrificing his own very distinctive and Italian personality. A particularly important turning point was reached in 1951 with the cantata *Noche Oscura*, the first work in which Petrassi definitely explores a total chromaticism with the help of the twelve-note technique. In more recent works and as in the case of Dallapiccola there is a powerful stimulus stemming from the second Viennese school—particularly Schönberg and Webern. But the end results are quite different.

The Quartet dates from 1958 and shows that Petrassi (and here the contrast with Dallapiccola is most marked) is above all an instrumental composer, that he delights in the invention of arresting and beautiful sounds, and that he also exerts a powerful structural discipline which has roots not only in dodecaphony but more fundamentally in a classical attitude to theme and form.

The work is played without a break, but has five clearly defined movements. At the very opening all the strings play together a ten-note phrase, undulating and lyrical, which with its inversion forms the basic material of the whole work. The first movement indeed might be called a continuous variation on this material using many kinds of fragmentation, variations of tempo

and the characteristic Petrassian series of repeated notes and chords.

A short second movement (beginning at *Un Poco Allegretto*) dancing in character, lays emphasis on a purely rhythmic scheme—that of a constant 7/8 bar divided into every possible permutation of 2s and 3s.

The mysterious and imaginative *Presto* is based on the tonal contrast between arco and pizzicato, the predominant interval being the Webernian minor ninth. Again there are vivid contrasts of tempo and texture.

The last two movements of the work lay more emphasis on thematic relationship in the classical sense. The *Vigorouso* opens with material related to the opening theme of the work, and soon the viola leads off in a long vigorous paragraph which almost but not quite becomes a fugue subject. At any rate the texture is fugal and the viola is followed by cello, first and second violin. But the neo classical allusion is soon dissolved into mysterious imitative arpeggios.

The final adagio also contains a quasi-fugal central section, but for the most part it consists of melodic fragments and long held chords which convey a message of profound despair. The Italian critic Mario Bortolotto calls it "one of the greatest of Petrassi's poetic achievements". K.L.

INTERVAL

BEETHOVEN 1770-1827

Quartet in E flat, opus 74

Poco adagio—Allegro

Adagio ma non troppo

Presto—Più presto quasi prestissimo

Allegretto con Variazioni

The accepted division of Beethoven's work into three periods, suggested in Fétis' *Biographie universelle des musiciens* and consecrated by Wilhelm von Lenz, is all very well until one tries to find the seams. This 'Harp' quartet of 1809 has all the uncomplicated lyricism of the *Les Adieux* piano sonata, written at the same time and in the same key. The F minor quartet of the next year, however, makes no such compromises and looks forward to the great later quartets. But any attempt to begin the 'late' period in 1810 must distract us from similarities between this quartet and

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the very late opus 127, also in E flat, also lyrical. Indeed there is hardly an element of Beethoven's style not already evident to the attentive ear in the three piano sonatas, opus 2. Better to speak of Beethoven's moods; and this one, frank, heart-on-sleeve, is as characteristic as any of the others.

The slow introduction suggests a tonally confused and problematic piece. First A flat, then F minor are hinted at; but after a slow chromatic scale the allegro begins, quite direct and unequivocal, with a rising triadic figure, followed by a more intricate but no less lucid texture, with the three upper instruments in counterpoint. In the transition the triadic figure recurs constantly in pizzicato, earning the quartet its nickname. The long development springs first from the main subject, then delays the reprise for many bars with motives therefrom, including the 'harp'. After the recapitulation comes an exciting coda, the pizzicati now accompanying a brilliant violin concerto.

The slow movement is in an easy rondo form, the refrains being varied. The first episode is in the minor; the second in D flat, the subdominant. The coda threatens to reprise the first episode, and though this is abandoned, there is a backward glance at the tonic minor key just before the end. Such a movement embodies that virginal unsentimental tenderness peculiar to Beethoven.

A breakneck scherzo in C minor ought to recall the *Fifth Symphony*. Surprisingly, it is rather Mendelssohn who is suggested here, although the much quicker trio, in C major, is wryly contrapuntal, as in the symphony. The movement has the double-trio structure which is common enough: scherzo, trio, scherzo, trio, scherzo, the last section modulating and leading continuously into the last movement.

The finale is studiously light. In other works Beethoven was moved to replace over-light finales with weightier movements, but here that is not necessary, and the little poised allegretto melody serves to cancel all that was dark or rugged in the previous music. At first the variation procedure is that of division, the simplest of all; finally there are rhythmic variations, the sixth and last a little quicker and with a rhythm of two-against-three. This leads into the coda, which threatens to begin a seventh variation, pianissimo, then with a figure from Variation III, in a crackling unison, comes to a confident close. R.M.