

EDINBURGH  
UNIVERSITY  
CONCERTS

—  
1975-76

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

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Michael Beeston    Christopher Gough

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Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 6 November 1975

NIELSEN 1865-1931

Quartet No. 4 in F major, opus 44

*Allegro non tanto e comodo*

*Adagio con sentimento religioso*

*Allegretto moderato ed innocente*

*Allegro non tanto, ma molto scherzoso*

Apart from the attractive wind quintet the fourth string quartet is probably the best known of Nielsen's chamber works in this country. All four string quartets are comparatively early works, written between 1888 and 1906. The fourth originally appeared as opus 19 under the title *Piacevolezza*, but this title was suppressed when it was revised in 1906 between work on the second and third symphonies.

The opening movement is in a sonata rondo form in which the second group appears unusually, though characteristically for Nielsen, in the remote key of C-sharp minor. The mood is predominantly lyrical and graceful though there are moments of strenuous counterpoint. The slow movement is based on a chorale-like melody in C major but with modal touches. These are present also in the Allegretto, a movement whose charm is prone to be interrupted by grotesque fortissimos. There is a whimsical humour too about the finale, with its hiccuping main theme and odd little cadenza for the first violin which precedes the recapitulation and is quite unrelated to anything else in the movement.

SHOSTAKOVICH 1906-1975

Quartet No. 8 in C minor, opus 110

*Largo*

*Allegro molto*

*Allegretto*

*Largo*

*Largo*

Shostakovich's eighth string quartet was written in 1960 at a time when the composer's most profound thoughts were being expressed in chamber music rather than in symphonic works. It is dedicated to the memory of those who fell in the second world war. As in several other compositions of this period there is a good deal of quotation from earlier works in the eighth quartet, a feature which some consider lends it an almost autobiographical

quality. Passages are quoted from the first and tenth symphonies and a theme from the finale of the piano trio appears in the second movement. Material from the first cello concerto is used in the third, whilst the fourth includes music from *Lady Macbeth* and quotes the revolutionary song 'Crushed by the weight of bondage'. More important, however, is the use of the musical cipher derived from Shostakovich's name (DSCH=D, E-flat, C, B) which provides a motive that dominates the whole work. Again this is a feature shared by other compositions of this period.

The five sections of opus 110 are played without a break. The opening *Largo* forms a prelude in which the DSCH motive alternates with a second theme over a pedal point. Out of the semitone inflection in the latter the *Allegro* grows, initially punctuated by fierce chords on the lower strings. DSCH reappears in canon but this gives way to the quotation from the piano trio. Both groups of material in the *Allegro* are repeated and developed. In the *Allegretto* DSCH becomes a waltz. A high-pitched melody for cello accompanied by successions of fourths and fifths on the violins forms a trio which is preceded by the cello concerto theme. This also concludes the movement and is transformed into the prelude and postlude to the revolutionary song of the next *Largo*. The song is set over long pedal points which remind one of those in the first movement and effectively introduces the final *Largo*, a more contrapuntal treatment of DSCH whose muted close movingly recapitulates that of the first movement.

INTERVAL

MOZART 1756-1791

Quartet in B-flat major, (K.589)

*Allegro*

*Larghetto*

*Menuetto & Trio—Moderato*

*Allegro assai*

In 1789 Mozart visited Potsdam and was commissioned by Friedrich Wilhelm II to write a set of quartets. The King of Prussia was a cellist and Mozart apparently commenced the set with the intention of providing flattering opportunities for the talents of his royal patron. Work on them was interrupted by the composition of *Così fan tutte*, but in any case appears to have been

very slow. This is the period of the distressing begging letters to Puchberg. The circumstances of Mozart's life seem to have got the better of him and only three of the intended six quartets were completed. K.589 is the second of them and was written in May 1790.

It has been suggested that in writing them Mozart returned to drafts of unfinished works from the 1770's. Certainly the opening theme of K.575 has the air of J. C. Bach about it, and there is less subtlety too in K.589 than one finds in the 'Haydn' set (K.387-K.465) where Mozart's inspiration had been almost uniformly at white heat. This said, it must be admitted that even if the *Prussian* quartets are less intellectually demanding and less emotionally committed than their predecessors, they remain models of lucid and finely controlled workmanship solving the textural problem of the high-placed cello parts with consummate ease and mastery. What is less than Mozart's greatest writing is still loftily raised above that of lesser masters. And there are some striking moments: the lengthy trio to the minuet of K.589 is decidedly original and in the unusually short finale there is a breath-catching moment when Mozart unexpectedly slips into A minor just before the return of the main theme. M.T.

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*Next concert: Thursday 13 November*

THE ALBANY BRASS CONSORT  
EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY SINGERS

WILLIAM BRADE *Almand and Galliard*

JOHANN PEZEL *Suite of Dances*

*French Renaissance Chansons*

PURCELL *Music for the Funeral of Queen Mary*

MALCOLM ARNOLD *Quintet*

JOSEPH HOROVITZ *Music Hall Suite*

GABRIELI *Canzona Prima a 5*

DEBUSSY *Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans*

ANON *Sonata from Bankelsangelieder*

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## THE ALBANY BRASS CONSORT

Nigel Buddice *trumpet* David Richards *trumpet*  
Christopher Griffiths *horn* John Teague *trombone*  
John Fishwick *trombone* Anthony Swainson *tuba*

## EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY SINGERS

Herrick Bunney *director*

Caroline Garden *timpani*

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 13 November 1975