
Next concert: Thursday 27 November

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

SCHUBERT Quartet in E major, opus 125, no. 2

BORODIN Quartet no. 1 in A major

BARTOK Quartet no. 2, opus 17

EDINBURGH
UNIVERSITY
CONCERTS

1975-76

THE REID ORCHESTRA
Miles Baster *leader*

ALASDAIR MITCHELL
guest conductor

MILES BASTER *violin*

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Reid Concert Hall, Tuesday 4 December 1975

MOZART 1756-91

Symphony no. 40 in G minor, K. 550

Molto allegro

Andante

Menuetto—Allegretto

Finale Allegro assai

Tonight this symphony is being played in its original scoring of flute, with pairs of oboes, bassoons and horns, with strings. The additional clarinets of Mozart's second more familiar version (which cause a considerable alteration to the overall orchestral sonority) are omitted.

INTERVAL

ELGAR 1857-1934

Violin Concerto in B minor, opus 61

Allegro: Andante: Allegro molto

Although Elgar as a player was conversant with many instruments he was primarily a violinist, and in youth had thoughts of becoming a concert soloist. To this end he took some lessons with Pollitzer in London, but soon abandoned the idea. However, his ability to exploit string instruments to maximum effect was enhanced by this background, and it is hardly surprising that he should eventually write, in the most musical sense of the term a violinist's concerto, exploiting violinistic possibilities to the utmost within a firm symphonic context.

The work appeared in 1910 when the composer (who had come to maturity at a comparatively late stage of his career) was at the height of his powers. A previous attempt had been abandoned in the nineties.

After some weeks of exhaustion following the composition of the first symphony Elgar began sketches for the violin concerto and the second symphony in the spring of 1909 when he and Lady Elgar were staying near Florence at the villa of an American friend, Mrs Julia Worthington. Although the dedication is to the first performer of the work, Fritz Kreisler, it has been conjectured that Mrs Worthington is possibly referred to in the enigmatic prefix to the score, in Spanish, '*Aquí está encerra el alma de . . .*' ('Here is enshrined the soul of . . .').

An orchestra of only Brahmsian dimensions is called for, but all the skills of the master orchestrator are evident in subtleties of

colour, blend and balance. Special examples could include the soft trombone section accompaniments unmuted and then muted in respective appearances of the main secondary theme (on solo violin) in the slow movement. However, the most celebrated effect is in the work's cadenza which, unusually, is accompanied and occurs towards the end of the finale. Half of the string section is instructed by the composer to play triple- or quadruple-stopped pizzicato chords as a rapidly repeating *tremolando* effect to be 'thrummed with the soft part of three or four fingers across the strings.' This provides a background to gentle improvisatory arabesques on the solo violin. Although laid out on a large scale, the work follows in the normal nineteenth century concerto tradition. However little innovation there is in form and in general musical language, the voice is unmistakably personal in every bar of the work. The leaping contours of the initial idea of the group of melodic fragments which constitute the first movement's main subject are typical. Many moods are encompassed in frequent transformations of the various ideas ranging from the richly scored *nobilmente* passages through restlessly tense moments and almost exultant climaxes to the intimate lyrical passages associated most closely perhaps with the soloist's version of the second subject.

The slow movement in the remote key of B flat evokes an atmosphere of tenderness, and wistful longing typical of the composer's private world, away from all the pomp with which his name has been so much associated. A second statement of the initial orchestral theme has a magical companion theme with it on the solo violin which soon soars upwards in a passage, marked to be played with harmonics stated by Elgar himself to the work's great interpreter Sammons to require 'the sound of an English choirboy'. A lyrical bridging melody on strings moves towards D flat major for our secondary theme with soft trombone accompaniment.

This bridging idea is to dominate the soft coda of this movement, and also is to reappear in the central episode of the finale as well as after the solo violinist's musings on the first movement's ideas in the finale's accompanied cadenza.

The finale exploits sheer virtuosity more directly than elsewhere, with bustling activity in the introductory passages, an element of pageantry in the main idea, and a certain opulence in the rich lyricism of the ensuing ideas. However, then we have that cadenza with its contemplative reminiscences, and the exuberant final bars of the work dominated by a final statement of part of the works opening idea on the horns and cellos, in the major key.

L.C.