

EDINBURGH
UNIVERSITY
CONCERTS

—
1975-76

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

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Michael Beeston Christopher Gough

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Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 5 February 1976

STRAVINSKY 1882-1971

Three Pieces for String Quartet (1914)

In the years after the *Rite of Spring* Stravinsky wrote several works for chamber ensembles of which this is the first. They clarified his position as a true original. The savage economy of material, the preoccupation with rhythm almost in isolation, the unrelieved irony, the stony detachment which mark his definitive later works are all present in these three miniatures. In the first, the violin plays only four notes, arranged in shapes that recall the fragmentary themes of *The Wedding*, accompanied by a drone on viola and repetitive *pizzicati* on cello, and interrupted violently by the second violin with four other notes.

The expressionistic second piece alternates passages of obstinate repeated chords with wild recitative played largely over the fingerboard.

The last piece is a total contrast, a series of very slow chords, unrelenting, unbeautiful, inaccessible. R.M.

BEETHOVEN 1770-1827

Quartet in D major, opus 18, no. 3

Allegro

Andante con moto

Allegro

Presto

Convention and patronage might have tempted a young composer to venture beyond his strength, in the Vienna of 1795. In fact we know that Haydn had then only recently received Count Apponyi's commission for the six quartets, opus 71 and 74. But the young Beethoven, who knew how to make the most of his successes as pianist and composer of eight sonatas for the piano, knew his limitations as well. Judging by the evidence of his studies with Albrechtsberger, he must have come to realise that the heart of string quartet writing lay in the mastery of that contrapuntal freedom which he was striving to acquire; the form and style which had flowered so soon under his fingers at the keyboard were not the contrapuntist's skill, and well he knew it.

This work is really the first of the opus 18 quartets. On the advice of his friend the first violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh he placed his second quartet, in F, at the head of the series of six, where its impressive qualities are made even more obvious.

The D major is an essay in continuity; its slow-paced *Allegro* and lyrical *Andante* and the inventive Finale all testify to Beethoven's studies, but the voice and the utterance already begin to be his own. C.K.

INTERVAL

PROKOFIEV 1891-1953

String Quartet no. 1 in B minor, opus 50

Allegro

Andante molto vivace

Andante

Early in 1930 Prokofiev made an extensive and successful concert tour of America, Canada and Cuba, which resulted in two new commissions: the Boston Symphony Orchestra wanted a symphony to celebrate its 50th anniversary, and from the Washington Library of Congress came the request for a string quartet. Both works were completed before the end of the year, the Fourth Symphony during the summer and the quartet by December. The quartet was something of a new venture for Prokofiev, and it was to have "two distinctive features: firstly, the finale is a slow movement and secondly, the key of B minor is rarely chosen for string quartets." The placing of the final *Andante* is extremely effective, for it is without doubt the emotional climax of the work. Its sinewy lines and poignant dissonances are beautifully conceived for the medium—so that much of its intensity is lost in its later version for string orchestra. As for the key of the work, Prokofiev was to find out (though not to give in to) the main reason for its rarity: "the tonic B is just half a tone below the limits of the cello and viola range".

A third distinctive feature—distinctive in its very unlikeliness—is the apparent influence of Beethoven on the quartet (Prokofiev had studied Beethoven's quartets in railway carriages between recitals in the spring of 1930). The evidence of such a study requires a sensitive ear indeed—the counterpoint in the development section of the first movement, perhaps, or the energy and drive of the Scherzo. Much more striking is the quartet's strong musical ties with Prokofiev's light, elegant and lyrical score, completed the year before, for the ballet *The Prodigious Son*.

R.McA.

RAVEL 1875-1937

String Quartet in F

Allegro moderato

Assez vif

Très lent

Vif et agité

This quartet was finished in 1903, just after *Jeux d'Eau*. Together, these works established Ravel as an important figure. Both have the luxuriant sound quality and spick-and-span form which typify him.

Like *Jeux d'Eau*, the first movement of the quartet is in a kind of sonata form, but in both works the essential feature of this form is missing: the transposition of the second subject in the recapitulation. In the quartet, however, the tender and ecstatic second subject, with violin and viola two octaves apart, though untransposed on its return, has its accompaniment shifted to give the illusion of a change of key.

The next movement is a scherzo with two ideas, the first having cross-rhythms, the second cantabile. The slow trio uses both ideas; the reprise of the scherzo is only partial.

The slow movement is an enthralling rhapsody, many of its ideas being related to the first movement. The finale, beginning in quintuple metre with a driving chromatic motive, afterwards presents a free sonata structure with themes related to those of the first movement. The coda extends the chromatic introductory motive. R.M.

Forthcoming concerts:

Tuesday 17 February

CONCERT BY STUDENTS OF THE
MUSIC FACULTY

Wednesday 18 February

WIND QUINTET OF THE SOUTH WEST
GERMAN RADIO STATION

ONSLow Quintet in F, opus 81, no. 3
EGK Five pieces for wind quintet (1974)
HAYDN Divertimento in B flat (with the St. Anthony Choral)
FRANCAIX Quartet for wood-winds
LIGETI Six Bagatelles for wind quintet (1953)
(This concert is presented with the aid of the Scottish German Centre)

Thursday 19 February

REID MEMORIAL CONCERT
THE REID ENSEMBLE
MICHAEL TILMOUTH *conductor*

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY SINGERS
HERRICK BUNNEY *director*

J. S. BACH Cantata no. 182 (BWV 182)
HANDEL Suite no. 1 in F major from *The Water Music*
O. GIBBONS Welcome Song *Do not repine fair sun*
F. BARSANTI Concerto Grosso, opus 3, no. 4
Music by General Reid

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