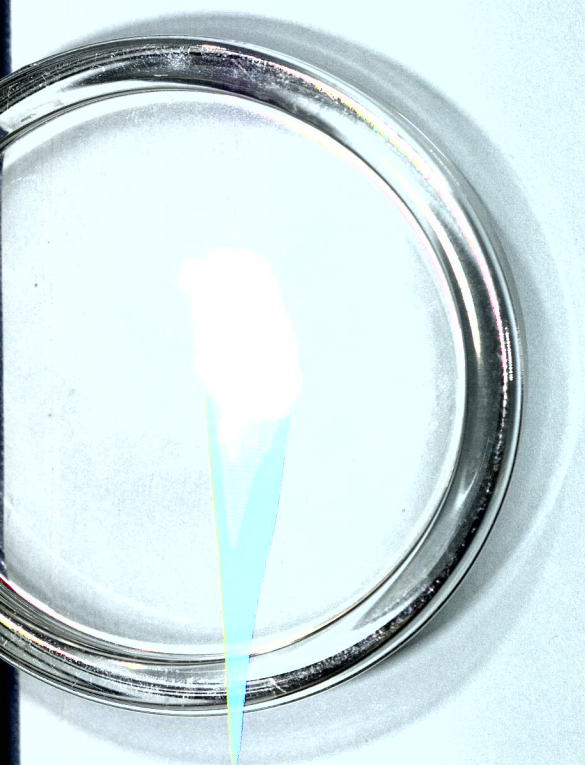




EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY CONCERTS

1975-76

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

Miles Baster Peter Markham
Michael Beeston Christopher Gough

with
DAVID NICHOLSON
flute

THE SUMMERHALL PRESS LIMITED
12a West Newington Place, Edinburgh

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 26 February 1976

SHOSTAKOVICH 1906-1975

String Quartet no. 6 in G major, opus 101

Allegretto

Moderato con moto

Lento

Allegretto

Shostakovich's sixth quartet, written in 1956, represents a point of lyrical repose between the tenth and eleventh symphonies. Its predominantly genial first movement recaptures the spirit of the *Finale* of the Piano Quintet composed some sixteen years earlier, and the *Moderato* too seems like an echo of the *Scherzo* of the quintet though without its bluster and swagger. Simplicity is the keynote of opus 101, with its uncomplicated textures and its typically Russian method of building long paragraphs by melodic and rhythmic reiteration.

The innocent repeated Ds on the viola at the outset provide an important rhythmic motif and act too as a kind of tonal reference point, being forced down by a semitone to C-sharp at the commencement of the development and appearing at the beginning of the recapitulation initially displaced upwards to E-flat. The first movement provides two elements which serve to unify the whole work: the upbeat pattern of two quavers to the main theme is clearly the point of departure for much later thematic material, and the cadence in the last bars returns at the close of each movement of the quartet.

The slow movement is a *passacaglia*, a form employed on several occasions by Shostakovich with conspicuous success. Its theme returns in canon between cello and viola at the climax of the *Finale* though the intensity achieved by this means is short-lived and the work ends on the quiet and lyrical note with which it began.

INTERVAL

TOVEY 1875-1940

Variations on a theme by Gluck for flute and string quartet, opus 28

These variations, the second work to be included in this season's Reid Concerts to mark the Tovey centenary were written in 1913. They are dedicated to the celebrated French flautist Louis

Fleury, a champion of the modern French and English music of his day, who appeared with Tovey at several of the early Reid Concerts in the Assembly Rooms.

Gluck's theme, a straightforward binary melody for the flute simply accompanied by *pizzicato* strings, provides a structural basis to which Tovey, as might be expected, adheres very closely, though its one harmonic feature of interest, a neapolitan sixth chord, is the starting point for some far-flung tonal excursions.

There are six variations reaching a climax in the *Allegro agitato* of the fourth. As in Brahms' Clarinet Quintet, the wind instrument is an equal rather than superior partner in the texture. The fifth variation is a richly luxuriant *Adagio*; the sixth is an expanded coda in which the theme reappears in the flute surrounded by an intricate web of delicate figurations in the strings.

M.T.

BRAHMS 1833-97

Quartet in A minor, opus 51, no. 2

Allegro non troppo

Andante moderato

Quasi Menuetto, moderato—

Allegro vivace

Finale: Allegro non assai

From the celebrated article in which Schumann proclaimed the 20 year-old Brahms as "a chosen one", a genius "called to give expression to his times in ideal fashion," we know that string quartets formed a significant item in the portfolio of compositions which he had submitted to the older composer's inspection. Indeed, writing to Breitkopf and Härtel to urge them to publish some of Brahms' music, Schumann proposed that a string quartet should head the list as opus 1. But the quartet, like the symphony, was a form in which the achievement of the Classical masters daunted Brahms as much as it inspired him. He withdrew the opus 1 quartet as unworthy, and it was nearly 20 years before he finally felt ready to publish works in this form: the string quartets in C minor and A minor opus 51. In the meantime, he confessed to a friend, more than 20 quartets had been composed, only to be consigned to oblivion again almost at once.

Though the quartet is dedicated to the Viennese surgeon Theodor Billroth, there seems some justification for supposing that Brahms had Joachim very much in mind when composing it. The principal theme of the first movement incorporates

Joachim's F.A.E. (*frei aber einsam*) cipher, while, according to Kalbeck, the declamatory middle section of the *Andante* alludes to a Magyar dance that formed a favourite item in the great violinist's repertory: quasi-Hungarian tones are to be heard in the principal theme of the finale, too.

It is characteristic of Brahms' large-scale instrumental music that while ostensibly laid out in a conventional manner, the quartet should in fact be full of fresh insights into, variations on, and complications of, classical practice. As examples one might cite the blending of sonata-rondo and variation principles in the finale, or the oblique establishment of key at the start of the first movement—a detail with which Brahms makes much play at the recapitulation—or, in the *Andante*, that quality of "motivic density" which so enthralled Schoenberg. D.K.

Next concert: Thursday 4 March

HENZE *El Cimarron*

(*Edinburgh University acknowledges the financial support of the Scottish Arts Council*)

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EL CIMARRON - HENZE

MICHAEL RIPPON *baritone*

GARY KETTEL *percussion*

TIMOTHY WALKER *guitar*

SEBASTIAN BELL *flute*

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 4 March 1976