

RACHMANINOV arr. Hazel Scott

Prelude in C sharp minor, opus 3, no. 2

Michael Avery *piano*

There has been an element of satirizing the whites in Negro jazz ever since its beginnings with ragtime and the cakewalk. This developed into 'jazzing the classics' after the First World War. It was practised by everybody from big dance bands to the solo pianists such as Hazel Scott. Either because of the colour of her skin, or because she just was not good enough, Miss Scott failed to become a concert pianist. However, her ambition thwarted, she was mildly successful at New York's famous jazz venue, the Café Society, playing arrangements of classical favourites. M.A.

Next concert: Thursday 13 May

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

MENDELSSOHN Quartet in E flat major, opus 12

JOHN BULLER *Familiar* for two violins, viola and cello (first performance) Commissioned by Edinburgh Quartet with financial assistance from the Scottish Arts Council.

PROKOFIEV Quartet no. 2

BEETHOVEN Quartet in E minor, opus 59, no. 2

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY CONCERTS

1975-76

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

Miles Baster Peter Markham
Michael Beeston Christopher Gough

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 13 May 1976

MENDELSSOHN 1809–1847

Quartet in E flat major, opus 12

Adagio non troppo—Allegro non tardante

Canzonetta: Allegretto

Andante espressivo

Molto allegro e vivace

This quartet, completed in September 1829, is one of the products of Mendelssohn's first visit to Britain, a period as carefree, as packed with novel experiences—ranging from elegant soirées in London society to storm-tossed passages to the Hebrides—and as productive as any in his life. It is contemporary with the Welsh piano fantasies, and the original plans and sketches for a “Scotch” symphony and a “Hebrides” overture.

Perhaps the most valuable of the types of exercise that the young Mendelssohn used to work for his teacher Zelter, was that of composing on the model of quartet movements by Haydn, using themes of his own, but imitating precisely all the details of Haydn's forms. With his craft of composition founded on the intimate knowledge of such models, it is hardly to be wondered at that Mendelssohn remained a life-long admirer of the beauty and flexibility of classical forms, particularly of sonata and fugue. In his early years, however, an equally powerful influence was exerted by the late works of Beethoven. Several instrumental pieces of the late 1820s boast such features as the interlinking of movements by the cyclic use of themes, and the blending of the principles of sonata and fugue. The E flat quartet is less remarkable in this particular than the earlier one in A minor, opus 13; but characteristic of this still experimental period is the use Mendelssohn makes of a minor-key theme emerging during the development of the first movement. This episode is taken up again in the coda to the movement and, subsequently, in both the development and coda of the finale.

D.K.

JOHN BULLER b. 1927

Familiar, for two violins, viola and cello (first performance)

Commissioned by the Edinburgh Quartet with financial assistance from the Scottish Arts Council.

This is not in any sense in the classical quartet classification; it is just a piece written for the quartet of two violins, viola and

cello, a “family” of instruments, and which examines a little of the tensions, patterns and emotions set up in other familiar family groupings. Other obvious musical *quadrivium* groupings are *legato*, *staccato*—and on either side of these—*glissando* and fragmentation; also rhythm, melody, pattern and sound colour (including ‘harmony’ or density).

The piece was written for the Edinburgh Quartet and for my colleagues: all at Alison House. J.B.

INTERVAL

PROKOFIEV 1891–1953

String Quartet no. 2 in F major, opus 92

Allegro sostenuto

Adagio

Allegro—Andante molto—Allegro

With the outbreak of war in June 1941 the Soviet government evacuated large numbers of artists, musicians and poets away from Moscow to the comparative safety of the central Asiatic republics. Prokofiev, along with Kabalevsky and Shaporin, was taken to Nalchik, at the foot of the Caucasian mountains, where he spent the autumn of 1941 working on two important new scores, the opera *War and Peace* and the Second String Quartet.

The quartet, in particular, was entirely a product of circumstance. Finding the area rich in folk culture, Prokofiev decided not only to incorporate local Kabardinian melodies into the work, but that the whole concept and texture of the quartet should take its inspiration from Caucasian folk music. Each of its three movements, although structured according to classical conventions, evokes aspects of folk dance or song. The *pizzicato* and *col legno* effects in the outer movements imitate the timbres of oriental plucked and percussion instruments, while the texture of the beautiful central *Adagio*—based on a Kabardinian love song—derives its intricate embellishments from the tones of the Caucasian bowed *kemange*.

In only one other score did Prokofiev attempt to fuse his idiom with specific folk practices. In 1942 he began work on an opera *Khan Buzay*, based on folk legends and melodies of Kazakhstan, but this intriguing project was never completed.

R.McA.

BEETHOVEN 1770-1827

Quartet in E minor, opus 59, no. 2

Allegro

Molto adagio

Allegretto

Finale: Presto

Of the three Rasumovsky Quartets, this in E minor is probably the most idiosyncratic and arcane, the one in which Beethoven's independence of the chamber-music ideals of the eighteenth century is most vigorously asserted, and adumbrations of the world of the late quartets are most often to be glimpsed.

The tone of the first movement is established in a remarkable first subject of brusque chords, epigrammatic thematic utterances, silences, and 'Neapolitan' juxtapositions of harmony. It is this last feature that gives rise, in the development, to tonal explorations as wide-ranging as any Beethoven had hitherto attempted.

An immensely long slow movement follows. Its principal theme is one of those hymnic *adagios* which Beethoven might more typically have held motionless for our contemplation in a series of ornamenting variations. But though variation processes are ubiquitous in the counterstatements and reprises of the theme, the movement is in fact laid out like a full-scale sonata. According to Czerny, this rapt vision came to Beethoven "as he was contemplating the starry sky and thinking of the music of the spheres".

Both the *allegretto* and the *finale* are comparatively unbuttoned, and neither shuns quirkiness. It is in the *maggiore* trio of the former that Beethoven incorporates a popular Russian tune, as a gesture of courtesy to Count Rasumovsky, it is commonly assumed. But it is a rum kind of courtesy. The tune is decked out in what sounds like a parody of academic counterpoint, with two grimly regular fugal expositions—each propelled on a counter-subject of "species"-like relentlessness—and culminates, like many a piece of academic counterpoint, in an ill-fitting canonic stretto. D.K.