



EDINBURGH  
UNIVERSITY  
CONCERTS

1980—81

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

Miles Baster Peter Markham  
Michael Beeston Christopher Gough

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 16 October 1980

PROKOFIEV 1891–1953

String Quartet No. 2 in F major, Op. 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.

HARPER b. 1941

String Quartet

*Allegro*

*Molto Adagio*

*Andante-Allegro*

The Quartet was composed between March and July 1967; it was written for, and is dedicated to, the Edinburgh Quartet. The moods of each of the three movements are acutely contrasted; the first is predominantly violent, the second static and tranquil, the last energetic but with sudden, whimsical contrasts. The work

employs a kind of serial technique but the basic structure of each movement is related closely to traditional forms. A rhetorical statement of the main material begins the first movement, after which the 1st Violin has a more extended version of it, with a restless, broken accompaniment. While there is no second subject, the movement is akin to sonata form in that its climax is achieved by a constant breaking down and intensive development of the material, culminating in a statement (inverted) of the opening idea, after which there is a brief recapitulation. Much of the movement's harshness stems from the emphasis laid on three adjacent semitones (which form an important element of the note-row from which the material is derived).

The second movement concentrates on the more relaxed intervals found in the row, notably the 4th, 5th and 9th. This movement is a theme and five variations. The theme is extremely simple and aims at utter repose, as does the first variation, a gentle, canonic treatment of it. The second variation involves a long melody at first on the 2nd Violin and then on the Viola, which gradually becomes more restless and leads into the 3rd variation, which is again canonic but very agitated. A sudden, ferocious outburst (with the strings tremulando), marks the climax, and the sense of conflict is maintained throughout variation 4 by the upper strings having long, sustained lines, while the lower still punctuate the music with staccato interjections. The opening calm eventually returns in the 5th variation.

The last movement is basically a rondo. There are three statements of the long main idea; the first mainly in unison (beginning on the cello after a slow introduction); the second entirely pizzicato (marked 'alla serenata') and the final one a vigorous canon. Much use is made in the episodes of a slow idea involving harmonics and the end of the work is intended to emphasise the sudden changes of mood which are the basis of much of this movement. After the last statement of the rondo theme the slow, harmonics passage returns; then the 1st Violin leads off into a 'prestissimo' coda, which dissolves, 'pianissimo' and muted, into nothing.

E.J.H.

INTERVAL

MENDELSSOHN 1809–1847

Quartet in E flat Op. 12 (1829)

*Adagio non troppo – Allegro non tardente*

*Canzonetta – Allegretto*

*Andante espressivo*

*Molto allegro e vivace*

Both this and the A minor quartet Op. 13 reflect Mendelssohn's interest in the late quartets of Beethoven; particularly in their formal freedom. While the A minor quartet explores a style full of dramatic contrast and rich chromaticism, the E flat quartet is characterised by a warm relaxed lyricism. A most expressive slow introduction leads to an *allegro* whose first and second subjects are in Mendelssohn's most song-like vein. The most dramatic moment is also the quietest – after the exposition the music restarts in E flat with the first subject, but this time a new idea appears, a sad, falling figure on F minor, announced *pianissimo*. This haunting phrase reappears in the middle of the last movement, an otherwise vigorous piece and introduces the coda of the first movement, which Mendelssohn uses to round off the whole work. The second movement is a gentle Canzonetta with a characteristically light-footed *scherzo* section, and the slow movement is a fine example of Mendelssohn's expressive lyricism.

E.J.H.

*Next Concert: Thursday 23rd October*

DAVID NICHOLSON *flutes*

HEATHER CORBETT *percussion*

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