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# CONCERTS AT THE UNIVERSITY

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Autumn - Winter 2016

Tuesday 22 November 2016

1.10pm

City of Edinburgh Methodist Church

The Edinburgh Quartet

Rakhi Singh · violin

Gordon Bragg · violin

Simon Tandree · viola

Mark Bailey · cello

**Programme of work by BEETHOVEN.**



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
*Edinburgh College of Art*

## String Quartet Op. 59 No. 2

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

- (i) Allegro
- (ii) Molto adagio
- (iii) Allegretto
- (iv) Finale: Presto

Scene: 1807, a freezing cold winter's evening in Vienna, a small hall attached to the restaurant Zum Römischen Kaiser (At the Sign of The Roman Emperor). Some of the city's great and good have gathered to hear the three new quartets that Count Andreas Rasumovsky, the Russian Ambassador, has commissioned from Beethoven. This is a composer at the cutting edge of new music, a composer that often goes too far.

The audience's response? Part delight, and part bewilderment. Shortly afterwards, a critic in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* was to describe the works as 'profoundly conceived and excellently worked out, but not easily comprehended'. He was being polite. At the first rehearsal one of the musicians is reputed to have tossed his score to the floor and stamped on it, saying that the composer was surely playing a joke on them. Beethoven's reply to the general criticism was to declare that the music was: 'Not for you, but for a later age'.

A few years earlier, having reached a point of unbearable despair that had brought him to contemplate suicide, Beethoven had finally confided to his family and friends a terrible secret – that he, the great pianist and composer, was going deaf. Having at last unburdened himself of his private sorrow, Beethoven entered into a period of glorious creativity. Masterpiece succeeded masterpiece – the third, fourth, fifth, sixth symphonies, the opera *Fidelio*, the third and fourth piano concertos, the violin concerto, as well as numerous chamber works. This miraculous flow was at its fullest when he wrote the Rasumovsky quartets, at the age of thirty-six.

The second quartet of the series begins with two *forte* chords followed by fragments of the main theme to come, interspersed with silence – a truly dramatic opening. Written in the same year as the *Appassionata*, this movement shares the piano sonata's passion and energy. The two chords are then developed to create music that becomes terse and lyrical by turn, and always charged with a nervous tension almost violent in its attack.

In complete contrast, the *adagio* which follows was not only the longest slow movement Beethoven had written to date – apart perhaps from the *Marcia Funebre* in his *Eroica Symphony* – but arguably also the most deeply felt. Indeed, he marked the score: 'This piece must be played with a great deal of feeling.' Carl Czerny observed that Beethoven's inspiration for this movement came to the composer while contemplating the spread of stars in the night sky. Perhaps it did. One thing is certain, there is a sense of infinite spaciousness, of unhurried serenity that touches on the sublime.

Next comes not the customary *scherzo* or *minuet*, but an *allegretto* whose delightful melody flits along on the off-beat. Count Rasumovsky had asked for some Russian themes to be included in the quartets. Beethoven obliges his patron by basing the middle section on a well-known Russian folk tune that was later used by Moussorgsky in *Boris Godounov*.

The last movement is an *allegro* that begins with an unsettledness emphasised by a cantering rhythm. Gradually this shifts to a cheerful gallop that, together with the restlessness that's never quite shaken off, brings the quartet to a glorious climax.

Ron Butlin

The Edinburgh Quartet has long been celebrated as one of Britain's foremost chamber ensembles, having appeared regularly at prestigious venues across the UK and toured extensively across Europe, the Far and Middle East, and North and South America.

In addition to a busy concert schedule the Edinburgh Quartet is frequently featured in radio broadcasts for the BBC and other stations. Recently this has included live appearances on Classics Unwrapped (BBC Radio Scotland) and Jazz Line-Up and In Tune (BBC Radio 3) as well as video recordings for Studio One Sessions, which appear on the BBC Radio Scotland website.

The Edinburgh Quartet is committed to nurturing talent and is resident at the University of Aberdeen and the University of Stirling whilst maintaining strong associations with the University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh Napier University. As well as giving a regular classical concert series at each of these institutions, the players work with composition students, instrumentalists and student teachers. In addition to this the Edinburgh Quartet's outreach programme encompasses workshops for primary and secondary school children and tutoring adults on the Variations Summer School in Ullapool and an annual Spring Chamber Music Course in Linlithgow.

The Quartet has always been a champion of new music and has worked with many important and prolific composers of our age including James MacMillan, Michael Tippett and Howard Blake.

The Edinburgh Quartet has an extensive discography available on various labels such as Delphian, Linn, Meridian and RCA. Among their recordings are the complete string quartets of Hans Gál (Meridian), Kenneth Leighton (Meridian) and Mátyás Seiber (Delphian), as well as discs of Bartók, Robert Crawford, Haydn, Schubert and Thomas Wilson.

#### FORTHCOMING CONCERTS:

Tuesday 22 November, 7.30pm.

Reid Concert Hall, Bristo Square

Edinburgh University String Orchestra

Will Conway (conductor)

HANDEL Concerto Grosso Op.6 No.5

BRITTEN Simple Symphony

TCHAIKOVSKY Serenade for Strings

Tickets: £10 (non-students) / £5 (students) available on the door.

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Thursday 24 November, 7.30pm.

Reid Concert Hall, Bristo Square

Edinburgh University Composers' Orchestra

Peter Nelson (conductor)

Contemporary works composed recently by students and local musicians

Admission Free (donations welcome).

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Friday 25 November, 1.10pm.

Reid Concert Hall, Bristo Square

Anne Desler (mezzo-soprano) and John Kitchen (organ)

MONTEVERDI Laudate dominum

FRESCOBALDI Canzon post il Comune

FRESCOBALDI Toccata cromatica per le levatione

BUXTEHUDE Magnificat primi toni BuxWV 203

BUXTEHUDE Three organ chorales

GRANDI O quam tu pulchra es

MONTEVERDI Exulta Filia Sion

Admission Free