
CONCERTS AT THE UNIVERSITY

Spring - Summer 2017

Tuesday 21 March 2017

1.10pm

City of Edinburgh Methodist Church

The Edinburgh Quartet

Zoë Beyers · violin

Tom Hankey · violin

Catherine Marwood · viola

Mark Bailey · cello

with

James Willshire · piano

Programme of works by SHOSTAKOVICH.



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

Cello Sonata in D minor, Op. 40

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Moderato
Moderato con moto
Largo
Allegretto

The Soviet State was an ever present factor in Shostakovich's career. The 'Cello Sonata initially did well in Russia, particularly as the result of a tour in 1938 by its 'cellist dedicatee Viktor Kubatsky with the composer. But it was the assassination of Kirov on 1 December 1934, instigating the Great Terror only a few weeks before the work's Leningrad première on 25 December, which led to a period of difficulties with the authorities and the official shunning of Shostakovich's music. The Sonata also came at a time of great marital difficulties with his wife Nina. Nevertheless the Sonata has always been one of Shostakovich's most popular works in the West.

It is a deceptive piece, with what have been described as "rays of sunshine", "lyricism" and "peasant joy", covering an underlying layer which is sardonic, strained and distinctly bitter. It does, however, contain a flirtation with nostalgia from the composer's pre-Revolutionary boyhood. This delicate, genteel, nostalgic look at the past can be identified in the opening melody, described by a Soviet critic as a "model of bourgeois music". He was, in fact, more perceptive than he realised in identifying the music as an evocation of a simpler and freer way of life. The lyrical second subject is as charming as the first, but the movement ends darkly on a drumming figure previously introduced at the end of the second subject

It is said that Shostakovich worked with unaccustomed speed to complete the first movement in two days. He then took a holiday in the Crimea and finished the work within a month. The second movement is a brutal, clumsy folk-dance full of satire, the trio dramatised by flashing scale passages, arpeggios and glissandi. The Largo is a gloomy, vehement song of sorrow which gives way to a mocking vitriolic sarcasm in the final Allegretto, in rondo form.

John Dalton

String Quartet No. 1 in C major

Dmitri Shostakovich

Moderato
Moderato
Allegro Molto
Allegro

Many political regimes feel threatened by art. In *The Republic*, Plato affirmed that in the ideal state ban all poets would be banned, and all music would be forced to conform to very strict laws. In many present-day countries, musicians and artists live under the constant threat of violence and imprisonment from the authorities, the fear of assassination even.

Dmitri Shostakovich suffered in a like manner. His String Quartet No. 1 (1938) came after a particularly difficult time. Four years previously, his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1934) had been acclaimed a masterpiece by the Soviet music critics, musicians and general public alike. It was celebrated as a work of genius – that is until a year or so later, when Stalin himself attended a performance. The Soviet leader strongly disapproved of it, alluding to its bourgeois tendencies. Almost overnight, the opera was denounced as decadent, the official Party newspaper Pravda reassessed the work and condemned it as 'all wrong'. Failing to conform to the tenets of State-approved Socialist Realism – what has been lampooned as the 'boy-meets-tractor' approach to art – the opera was immediately withdrawn. The composer now lived in constant dread of hearing that terrifying midnight knock on the door (which he was later to depict so chillingly in his Thirteenth Symphony).

Shostakovich's apology for having strayed from the true Soviet path is his Fifth Symphony (1937). Its subtitle 'A Soviet Artist's Practical Creative Reply to Just Criticism' was not supplied not by the composer himself, however, but by a party hack. Shostakovich had been accepted back into the fold. For the time being, anyway. As we learn from Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoir of the period, *Hope Against Hope*, most serious artists in the USSR lived in a similar, near-unbearable state of unrelieved anxiety.

After composing the string quartet, Shostakovich would have been understandably nervous, and arranged a thorough play-through in advance. This resulted in the first movement becoming the last and vice versa. He writes: 'It didn't come out dead right, but then it's hard to compose well. It takes skill.' A truly modest composer – and, at less than fourteen minutes long, this is a truly modest quartet, though a fine one. Shostakovich was later to call it 'a springtime work'. While it sounds genial, and even joyous on occasion, there are moments of genuine serenity.

The quartet was premiered in Leningrad by the Glazunov Quartet in October 1938; a second performance was given a mere six days later by the Beethoven Quartet. It is in four brief movements. The opening *Moderato* is delightful and extends a warm invitation to the listener. The movement which follows is a series of variations on a theme introduced by the viola, playing unaccompanied. A very brief *Allegro Molto* then takes us into the finale. Though taking less than three minutes, this closing *Allegro* is perhaps the most complex movement and is charged with wit and high spirits.

Ron Butlin www.ronbutlin.co.uk

Born in London, **Mark Bailey** has performed all over Europe, the UK, USA and Canada, the Far East and Middle East, both as soloist and cellist of the Edinburgh Quartet. The EQ is one of the UK's longest running chamber ensembles and celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2010. In 2007 the EQ received the much coveted *Gramophone* Editor's Choice for their recording of the complete string quartets of Hans Gal.

Mark went to the Royal College of Music on a Foundation Scholarship where he won all the major cello awards, including the concerto and recital prizes. He was then invited by Paul Tortelier to study with him in France for two years, attracting scholarships from the British Council, The Countess of Munster and Suggia Trusts and the Martin Musical Scholarship Fund. There he was awarded the Premier Prix de la Musique de Chambre de Nice. Later he worked with William Pleeth and Jacqueline du Pré, as well as performing in master classes with, amongst others, Zara Nelsova and Johannes Goritzski.

As soloist he has broadcast for French and Spanish Radio and recorded recitals for the BBC. Works have been recorded under Meridian, Delphian and The Divine Art labels. In the course of his distinguished career Mark has given recitals at the Purcell Room, Wigmore Hall and has appeared as soloist in many leading British festivals.

Mark taught at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama for many years, and now teaches cello and chamber music at the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Napier.

James Willshire performs internationally as soloist and chamber musician. He appears regularly at the major UK concert halls, including the Bridgewater Hall, Barbican, Glasgow City Halls, and Royal Festival Hall, and has broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. James's recordings of contemporary British piano music have been reviewed extensively, receiving universal acclaim.

Festival appearances include performances at the 2015 Piano Festival at Glasgow Royal Concert Halls, the Lichfield, Cheltenham and Winchester Festivals, the Kilkenny Arts Festival, the Cantilena Festival, the Edinburgh Fringe, the Roman River Festival, 'Il Festival di Londra', the Victoria International Arts Festival and the Paxos International Festival.

A regular performer of contemporary music, James has given world premiere performances of works by Ronald Stevenson, John McLeod and Rory Boyle. James's debut recording on Delphian Records featured the complete piano music by Boyle; it was released in 2011 to critical acclaim, including a five-star review from *The Scotsman*. In October 2013 his recording of piano music by Ronald Stevenson was released. The CD was reviewed by *BBC Music Magazine*, *Gramophone*, received a five-star review in *Classical Music* magazine, and was awarded an IRR Outstanding by *International Record Review*. His recording of piano music by David Jennings was chosen as one of *MusicWeb International's* Recordings of the Year 2013.

James maintains a strong interest in music education and teaches the piano at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and St Mary's Music School.