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# CONCERTS AT THE UNIVERSITY

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Autumn - Winter 2017

Tuesday 17 October 2017

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

The Edinburgh Quartet

Tom Hankey · violin

Tamara Elias · violin

Catherine Marwood · viola

Mark Bailey · cello

Programme of works by MOZART and RAVEL.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
Edinburgh College of Art

## String Quartet in D major, K499 'Hoffmeister'

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Allegretto  
Menuetto  
Adagio  
Allegro

The weather was getting worse and worse, the snow falling heavier. Finally the coachman refused to go any further. He and his exhausted horses had reached the inn at Lodi to find the road ahead utterly impassable. The Mozart Family Roadshow was forced to make an unscheduled stop on its first Italian tour. Leopold Mozart clambered down from the coach followed by his young son Wolfgang, the musical wunderkind. It was 15 March 1770. Having recovered from the bitter cold, thirteen year-old Wolfgang sat down at the table now cleared of their meal and spent the early evening composing his first string quartet. He notes finishing it at 7pm.

By 1785 the thirty year-old Mozart was married, living in Vienna and struggling to live as a freelance musician. It was a Saturday evening in February, three of his latest quartets had just been premiered in the presence of his good friend Haydn, to whom they were dedicated. Europe's greatest living composer then turned to Mozart's father and said, 'Before god and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by reputation.' In the following year Mozart wrote *The Marriage of Figaro*, one of the greatest operas in the repertoire, and his String Quartet in D No. 20, known as the *Hoffmeister*, another masterpiece.

This quartet was written for and dedicated to the publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister, hence the quartet's nickname. Mozart was at the peak of his success. His melodies were whistled in the Vienna streets and, for the moment at least, his earnings exceeded his rather lavish expenditure. Mozart and Hoffmeister had quarrelled a few months earlier over the composer's recent Piano Quartet in G Minor, the publisher declaring the work too difficult for amateurs. Hoffmeister asked him to 'write in a more popular vein, otherwise I shall be unable to publish and pay for any more of your works'. In response, Mozart offered his next piano quartet to a rival publisher. Honour satisfied, it was time to build bridges. The *Hoffmeister* quartet was hailed by a German critic as 'written with that fire of imagination and that correctness which have long since won for Herr Mozart the reputation as one of the best composers in Germany'. In due course, Hoffmeister went on to publish further works by Mozart.

The D major quartet is in four movements. The opening Allegretto begins with a unison statement that develops into a thematic richness deepened by unexpected sonorities. The brief minuet which follows is filled with a true joviality of spirit elegantly complemented by its D minor trio section. The Adagio is expansive in its wealth of melody. The closing Allegro combines complexity, lightness of touch and sheer energy in an exhilarating mix.

Ron Butlin

## String Quartet in F major

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Allegro moderato. Très doux.  
Assez vif. Très rhymé  
Très lent  
Vif et agité

Maurice Ravel was born in Ciboure, a suburb of the French-Basque town of St Jean-de-Luz, near Biarritz. His father was a Swiss inventor who tried his hand at everything from an early combustion engine to a notorious circus entertainment, 'The Whirlwind of Death', which finally had to be scrapped as it proved fatal. His mother's Basque-Spanish heritage was of lifelong importance to the composer and he usually holidayed near his birthplace. In his own lifetime, the street overlooking the harbour in Ciboure was renamed 'Quai Maurice Ravel'.

Ravel was a dandy in dress, a confirmed chain-smoker (heavy-duty Caporals) and a perfectionist in his creative work. He entered the Conservatoire in 1889 to study piano, theory and composition and tried for the highly prestigious Prix de Rome five times, only to be rejected year after year. In 1905, though he was by now well-known for such works as the *Pavane pour une infante défunte*, he was turned down yet again. This caused such public outrage the director Dubois was forced to resign, to be replaced by Ravel's teacher Gabriel Fauré.

From 1900 to the beginning of the war, a group of avant-garde artists, musicians, poets, writers and critics – self-styled as 'Les Apaches' – regarded themselves as outcasts from the intellectual mainstream of Paris. They met regularly to share and discuss their work. Ravel and Debussy were members, as were Stravinsky, Manuel de Falla and others. Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, commissioned by Diaghilev for the Ballets Russes in 1909, received a mixed response when it finally opened three years later. All Conservatoire students were forbidden to attend, Saint-Saëns loathed it. The Apaches, of course, loved it and the ballet soon became an international success.

At the age of 40, Ravel enlisted in WW1 as a transport driver, sometimes having to deliver live ammunition at night under heavy German bombardment. The after-effects of the war and his failing health slowed his creativity, but not his dandyism. When he toured the USA in 1927 he took 50 pastel shirts and 20 pairs of pyjamas. At the premier of *Boléro* (1928), a member of the audience shouted out that the composer must be mad, causing Ravel later to declare that the lady clearly understood the piece. A car crash in 1932 left his mental faculties severely impaired and he never fully recovered from the brain surgery carried out several years later. He fell into a coma and died on 28 December 1937, aged 62.

Despite some faint echoes of Debussy, Ravel's only string quartet (1902-3) is a true and individual masterpiece, a delight from start to finish with its fluid tempo and luxuriance of instrumental colour. It opens with a melody full of longing as if for a vanished past; the second movement, a vibrant scherzo of rhythmic subtlety, leads into a slow movement of great delicacy and depth. The final movement, marked, *Vif et agité*, recalls and transforms some earlier material, bringing the quartet to a most satisfying close.

Ron Butlin ([www.ronbutlin.co.uk](http://www.ronbutlin.co.uk))

**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. It 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.

#### FORTHCOMING CONCERTS:

Friday 20 October

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall, Bristo Square

Dorien Schouten (organ)

PRAETORIUS Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott

J.S. BACH Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit BWV 669

J.S. BACH Christe, aller Welt Trost BWV 670

J.S. BACH Kyrie, Gott Heiliger Geist BWV 671

J.S. BACH Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr BWV 676

SCHEIDEMANN Wir glauben all an einen Gott

TUNDER Jesus Christus, unser Heiland

Admission Free

Tuesday 24 October

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall, Bristo Square

Bobby Chen (piano)

HAYDN Sonata in C major Hob XVI:50

JOHN McLEOD Three Protest Pieces for piano

BACH-BUSONI Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ BWV639

BACH-BUSONI Chaconne in D minor BWV1004

LISZT Ballade No.2 in B minor S.171

Admission Free