THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH CONCERT SERIES **SPRING · SUMMER 2010**

Concerts at The University

Tuesday 23 February 2010
1.10pm
Reid Concert Hall

The Edinburgh Quartet

Tristan Gurney · violin
Philip Burrin · violin
Michael Beeston · viola
Mark Bailey · cello

Programme of works by HAYDN and SCHUMANN.

Quartet in G Op.64 No.4

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Allegro con brio; Menuetto – Allegretto; Adagio; Finale – Presto

Composed around 1790, this fourth quartet of the six dedicated to Tost, the former leader of the second violins of the Esterhazy orchestra, is one of the most extraordinary of the set. At first glance the work appears to be very ordinary in the key of G Major, very much an 'everyday' key in the eighteenth century, used when there were no special requirements. The opening phrase, comprising a rising arpeggio of the tonic chord modulating to the Dominant, is immediately balanced by its consequent turning into a full close. Nothing particularly remarkable about such procedures we may assume, and yet the rhythmic variety, with at least four well defined motives, and the sense of completeness, is a warning sign that the conventionally sounding surface is possibly hiding more than it reveals. Immediately Haydn begins to develop this apparently ordinary material, both thematically and texturally. Though suggesting a monothematic exposition as the opening returns in the Dominant as the first part of the second subject group, Haydn suddenly deepens the emotional perspective with a turn to the minor, thinning to a surprising two-part texture of strict counterpoint – incorporating inversion. Just as suddenly reverting to the major, he then launches the first violin on virtuoso figurations leading to a codetta theme which recalls the opening idea. The remarkable thing about all this activity is that it is all contained in only 38 bars – concision indeed! The opening interval of a third informs the beginning of each structural melody, drawing the material together. The conventional 'um-cha-cha-cha' accompaniment of the lower three instruments of the opening is used as the rhythm for the surprising contrapuntal section in the minor key. The intervals of a fourth and the sixth – both heard in the opening first three notes - assume greater importance as the work progresses.

The development section begins with modulations through conventional fifths relationships before settling on B pedal – at which point the two-part material is recalled, now with added chromatic harmonies. This is then turned into Dominant preparation for the anticipated return of the opening. Certainties are soon undermined, however, as Haydn makes a move to the tonic minor, continuing thematic and harmonic development. The minor theme is now turned to the major and used as a counterpoint to the virtuoso figuration of the first violin – now shared by all the players. Haydn challenges us with a question – is this recapitulation or a continuation of the development section with a false reprise? After a pause, the opening is once again quoted, and we wonder whether it is this moment which marks the recapitulation. The answer is given, but only after a few minutes, and the movement ends, rather extraordinarily with a recall of an apparently insignificant shaving from the close of the opening phrase. Haydn's concentration of the all this activity into 99 bars is remarkable. The reason for the plain-ness of the opening material is now clear – Haydn needs us to follow his logic and he therefore needs short and well defined ideas to catch the ear.

The second movement is a Minuet - Haydn's preferred order, as established in the earlier set of Quartets op.33. The opening theme is based on the initial notes of the first movement, turned upside down, and its continuation follows the melodic outline of that same idea. The Trio further develops this motive.

The slow movement follows the same melodic shape as the opening of the quartet. The structure of this song-like movement remains simple, even through its detailed melodic decorations. As if to compensate for each movement being in the major key, the central section is cast in c minor. Though sounding entirely natural, it is worth pointing out that the phrase structure of the opening theme contains a nine-bar (instead of the more expected eight-bar) phrase, and with this unexpected phrase length Haydn has some fun.

The opening of the *Finale Presto*, ostensibly a lighter movement, begins with a rising fourth and, once again outlines the melodic shape of the opening movement. The real glory and final resolution of this material, arrives with the second subject, which has a characteristically Haynesque, playful quality. The sonata structure is laid out with exemplary clarity, even if the ending of the work is a little 'up in the air' – perhaps a further tribute to the quartet's dedicatee?

This work is remarkable for its cogency and for the unexpected beneath its conventional-sounding surface. It seems almost because Haydn knew exactly what was expected of such a work he can toy with us, listeners and players alike. The work is wonderfully crafted but in such a way that, following the musical logic, we enter Haydn's teasing mind of subtle and never-ending invention.

String Quartet in A Major Op.41 No.3

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Andante espressivo - Allegro molto moderato; Assai agitato; Adagio molto; Finale. Allegro molto vivace

The year 1842 was Schumann's chamber music year. The three String Quartets were completed by the summer, and were followed by the Piano Quintet, Piano Quartet and, in January 1843, the Piano Trio. This positive production line had been preceded by an in-depth study of Quartets by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven in the early months of the year on Schumann's return to Leipzig, after he had accompanied Clara on the first part of one of her playing tours.

The A Major Quartet was composed in the remarkably short space of two weeks in July, and is considered by many to be the best of the three works in this genre. Schumann evidently intends us to notice the falling fifth with which the work begins - twice in the first violin and then in the cello. What is perhaps less obvious is the oblique approach to the main key, the tonic chord of which we do not hear until the fourth bar of the Allegro, and not in the opening introduction at all. Is this perhaps a subliminal recollection of the opening of Beethoven's first symphony, with its similar groping towards a key? The shape of Schumann's melody, with its unstable harmony,

influences much of what happens elsewhere in the Quartet. The second theme, first heard in the high register of the cello with a prominent use of the falling fifth, is harmonised with chords which are syncopated, giving an uneasy lilt to the accompaniment.

The first theme of the second movement in the relative key of f sharp minor is presented in a fragmentary way, and with its many syncopations gives rise to an unsettled feeling. The rising fourth (i.e. the inversion of the fifth) outlined by the first violin, provides a thematic link with the opening. The shape of this movement is original, appearing like a Scherzo and trio. But the return of the Scherzo is a newly poetic version at half speed, with the fragments now joined up and canons appearing between the first violin and viola. There follows what at first might appear as a second trio, but is a further re-interpretation of the opening section in two parts, defined by their contrasting emotional character - the passionate giving way to the lyrical. Though the anticipated elements of a central scherzo-type movement are all present here, the way in which Schumann interprets them is as unexpected as it is effective.

The slow movement opens with a rising melody on the first violin, and a fifth is again prominently outlined. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this opening is the lack of a tonic chord, for which we have to wait until the 18th bar - an unconscionable wait for a work of this period. This and the chromatic development of the opening introduction, look forward to the harmonic excursions of Wagner

The finale, like the opening movement, beginning from the harmonic standpoint of b minor, is extended and exuberant, and has a startling central section, marked 'quasi trio', in the unlikely key of F major. The opening material is re-established and the work proceeds to a fine, triumphant coda. Once again, in this movement, Schumann presents us with all the anticipated ingredients of a finale, but ordered in a new way.

The string writing of this work is often reminiscent of Schumann's piano textures, and the dreamy and the obsessive are close neighbours in a way not usually associated with this genre. Perhaps the work broke too much new ground in its many unexpected procedures to be fully understood by Schumann's contemporaries. However, with the advantage of historical perspective, we can now appreciate the originality of the work. Its increasing popularity, with many fine recent recordings, suggests that the time has now arrived for a reassessment of this wonderfully fresh and inventive composition.

(RBW Feb.2006)

After its formation, the **Edinburgh Quartet** quickly became established as one of Britain's foremost chamber ensembles, appearing regularly at prestigious venues across the country including London's Wigmore Hall and The South Bank Centre. It achieved international recognition after winning the Contemporary Prize at the Evian-les-Bains String Quartet Competition and has since toured extensively across Europe, the Far East, North and South America and the Middle East. Now in its fiftieth year, the Quartet is one of the longest running chamber ensembles in the UK with a busier performing schedule than ever before.