

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH CONCERT SERIES    AUTUMN · WINTER 2010

# Concerts at The University

Tuesday 26 October 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 MOZART and SHOSTAKOVICH**



## Quartet in B flat, K458 "The Hunt"

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

- (i) Allegro vivace assai
- (ii) Menuetto and Trio, Moderato
- (iii) Adagio
- (iv) Allegro assai

By writing his first quartet in 1755, Haydn gave himself a year's head start on Wolfgang Amadeus, then still a glint in Leopold Mozart's eye. Haydn went on to take the string quartet as a medium to great heights of refinement, noble shoulders on which the younger Mozart could stand and deliver the assured quartets which were to be dedicated to the older master.

Dated 9th November 1784, the fourth quartet of the set, in B flat major, is the most relaxed of the six. It came at a time of great promise in Mozart's life; he left the employ of the Archbishop of Salzburg, his name was becoming well known in Vienna and he joined the freemasons a month later. In literary circles there was also much life, with Beaumarchais's play *Mariage de Figaro* having just appeared and Mozart's near contemporary Robert Burns a year away from publishing his 1786 *Poems*.

In the first movement, the theme is hunting, but hunting in the surroundings of the drawing room. A very refined gallop through the countryside in the manner of a Viennese fete champêtre, with the horns ever present from the outset in the lively 6/8 meter. Though this is not a sparkling movement structurally, the interplay and mutual support between the four voices gives it plenty of life. A development that barely mentions the main hunting motive, starting with a new theme and concentrating on the business of the second subject's semiquaver fragments, leads into a standard recapitulation followed by a particularly long coda. This is perhaps by way of an apology; the chase resumed with renewed vigour with the violins in octave unison much of the time.

The short menuet, for once coming before the slow movement, is suave with a twist. The melody pulls to the off-beat, making it less than simple to follow as a whole, an extension of the rhythmic games seen at points during the first movement. The trio is the perfect companion, with a graceful line from start to finish.

The slow movement is perhaps the gem of the quartet. After a brief noble introductory passage, a gallant melody floats gracefully in the first violin, supported by a playful accompaniment that retains the rhythmic vitality of the preceding movements.

A controlled abandon marks the finale. A start that almost promises a race to the finish instead leads instead to the first of two contrasting themes, this one sprightly, the next sustained and full of repose. The playful rhythmic vitality leaps out at every turn and after a brief development the three themes play out to an ending full of wit.

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## Quartet No.8 Op.110

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

- (i) Largo
- (ii) Allegro Molto
- (iii) Allegretto
- (iv) Largo
- (v) Largo

Astonishingly this quartet was written in only three days in July 1960 on a visit to the city of Dresden which was badly bombed in World War 2. The use of the notes DSCH (in German nomenclature the notes D, E flat, C and B) act as a cypher for Shostakovich's own name and he explains the significance with characteristic modesty.:

'If I were to die one day, nobody would think of writing a piece in my memory.  
I therefore resolved to write one myself.'

In fact the concept of cyphers goes a good deal further than this and in quotations from other works there is a myriad of complex inter-relationships and emotional pain in this most passionate of works. The motive with which the work opens acts as a source of the main ideas of the whole quartet and much of the composition's concentrated power derives from this tight and disciplined control. From the eloquent and reflective opening, through a positively demonic scherzo, through the graphic dropping of bombs of the fourth movement, to the elegiac finale, Shostakovich sustains one extended line through this remarkable composition. The work not only more clearly defined Shostakovich's quartet style, but adds a new dimension to the expressive qualities of the string quartet as a medium in the last half of the twentieth century. Though the inspiration for the work might have been specific, Shostakovich here achieves a universality of expression. No wonder that this, above all other works, should have been the composition played at the funeral of the composer.

©Roger Bevan Williams, University of Aberdeen, November 2005

## THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

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. The Quartet has made numerous BBC TV and BBC Radio 3 broadcasts and can also be heard on Classic FM.

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. The Quartet is resident at Glasgow University and Napier University and also collaborates with Aberdeen and Edinburgh Universities.

## FORTHCOMING CONCERTS

Friday 29 October, 1.10pm

St. Cecilia's Hall

Duo Edelen

Fred Edelen · baroque cello

Christina Scott Edelen · harpsichord

GABRIELLI Sonata I in G, for cello and continuo

BYRD Fantasia (from The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book)

STEPHEN PAXTON Sonata III in C major

JACQUET DE LA GUERRE movements from *Suite IV in F* (Pièces de Clavecin, 1687)

MICHEL CORRETTE Sonata II in D minor (from *Les Delices de la Solitude*, Op. 20 c.1739)

ADMISSION FREE

Friday 29 October, 8.00pm

Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh.

Edinburgh University Chamber Choir, University of St Andrews Chapel Choir

University of Aberdeen Chamber Choir, Thistle Brass

Tom Wilkinson · organ

Michael Bawtree · conductor

JAMES MACMILLAN A New Song, Exsultet and  
Gaudeamus in loci pace

TARIK O'REGAN The Night's Untruth (Scottish Premiere)

GABRIEL JACKSON The Spacious Firmament I and II (Scottish Premiere)

PAUL MEALOR Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal (World Premiere)

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