

Concerts at The University

Tuesday 9 October 2012

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

The Edinburgh Quartet

Tristan Gurney · violin

Philip Burrin · violin

Jessica Beeston · viola

Mark Bailey · cello

Programme of works by HAYDN and BRIDGE



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

String Quartet Op.33 No. 1 in B minor

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Allegro moderato

Scherzando - Allegro

Andante

Presto

The key of B minor was not commonly used by Haydn – no symphony and only one other string quartet (Op.64 no.2) uses it. The beginning of this quartet presents a harmonic ambiguity in its first few moments - the tonality could be either in D Major or B minor. The presence of an early A sharp, pushes the music towards B minor, but the feeling of insecurity is further strengthened by the cello which resolves the F sharp into an interrupted cadence twice, before the close of the first musical sentence fixes the music in a clear B minor with the first strongly drawn cadence of the movement. Haydn blurs structural divisions with the intensity of his constant reinterpretation of the opening motives. But despite this, the structure is kept clear with the composer's usual harmonic and textural signposts, enabling us to share Haydn's conceits and dualities within the clearly and carefully controlled context of a sonata outline. The music seems effortless in its progression and sophisticated in its outline.

The thematic shape of the opening the Scherzo second movement and the third slow movement have great similarities - both beginning with a rising arpeggio. The opening two notes of the Scherzo are B and D - the same two tonalities with which Haydn began the whole work. Compared with earlier writing for the medium of the string quartet, this scherzo uses a new open-ness of texture and harmonically based imitation that gives an impression of being sprung from the very centre of the ensemble. The Trio, cast in the tonic B Major, is straightforward in outline and direct in its cheerful mood.

The following Andante cannot really be described as a slow movement but acts as a gentle promenade based on a rising arpeggio taken over from the scherzo. In an abridged sonata form, the second subject has a curiously insistent A sharp - which is in fact a reworking of this same note from the opening of the first movement. Here though, instead of creating an ambiguity of key, it presents a rather charming, almost folk-like effect. The more serious intention however, is to show this chromatic note being integrated into the main key, not as a threat but as a colouring.

The finale, like the two inner movements, begins with a theme once again derived from an arpeggio. The key has reverted to B minor but with an intense,

rhythmically repetitive motive which builds into musical sentences in a way that anticipates Beethoven. The resumption of D Major for the second subject, recalls the procedures of the first movement. The virtuoso nature of the first violin transition, and the close interplay between the two violins, serves to remind us of Haydn's expertise as a string player. The music is beautifully conceived for the medium. Freedom, ambiguity and exploration are welded into one coherent whole - truly a 'special way'.

Dr Roger B Williams. August 2012

Three Idylls

Frank Bridge (1874-1941)

Adagio molto espressivo - Allegretto moderato e poco rubato

Allegretto poco lento

Allegro con moto

Frank Bridge, a remarkable musician, was taught composition by C.V. Stanford at the Royal College of Music at the turn of the twentieth century. Leaving in 1903 as a viola player, he performed with the English String Quartet, and as a conductor, deputized for Sir Henry Wood. Belonging to a generation with its roots firmly based in the nineteenth century, Bridge gained a reputation for being more adventurous than his contemporaries.

Although *Three Idylls* is an early composition from 1906, there are already signs of a new and individual voice. The opening movement, beginning with a quiet tune in the lowest range of the viola, is richly chromatic. On its return, after a contrasting major section marked at a quicker tempo, the opening material is developed. The second movement comprises a striking opening in which the open scoring and the wistful use of chromatics struck the young Benjamin Britten so much that he used it as the theme for his early masterpiece for string orchestra *Variations on a Theme by Frank Bridge* thirty years later. The third Idyll, though starting more conventionally in C Major, soon develops chromatic inflections, and ends with a terrific climax, almost orchestral in its full scoring for string quartet.

The compositional language of Bridge is a curious mixture of the tonal and the chromatic. Some of the writing is indistinguishable from his contemporaries in its directness, but suddenly, almost without warning, Bridge moves to surprising, even startling sounds. The title Idylls at first may appear curious, but as the piece progresses, its relevance emerges in three, short pieces, each of which, while complete in itself, is part of a very attractive and original composition.

Dr Roger B Williams

The Edinburgh Quartet was founded in 1960 and 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.

The Edinburgh Quartet is resident at Edinburgh Napier University and the University of Aberdeen and also collaborates with Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities. In addition to a regular classical concert series at each of these institutions, the Quartet is committed to nurturing talent and championing new music. The ensemble has worked with many important and prolific composers of our age including James MacMillan and Michael Tippett, who selected the Edinburgh Quartet's recording of his First Quartet for re-release on EMI shortly before his death.

FORTHCOMING CONCERTS:

Friday 12 October, 1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Paul Stubbings · organ

Bach in stile francese

Praeludium in E flat BWV 552/1

Fantasia in C minor BWV 562

Eight movements forming a 'French Classical Organ Mass'

Pièce d'orgue BWV 572

ADMISSION FREE

Tuesday 16 October, 1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Postcards from Europe

Marianne Olyver · violin

Robert Schuck · piano

HANS GÁL Sonata in D (1933)

ERWIN SCHULHOFF Sonata (1927) Andante

Arr. JASCHA KREIN Gypsy Carnival

ADMISSION FREE