

Concerts at The University

Tuesday 23 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, RICHARD WORTH
and BRITTEN.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

String Quartet in B flat Op.33 No. 4

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

- (i) Allegro moderato
- (ii) Scherzo. Allegretto
- (iii) Largo
- (iv) Presto

The first movement of this Quartet is one of the most concentrated Haydn ever wrote. Although comprising only 89 bars, the sonata structure is perfectly formed and signposted for the attentive listener. The anticipated features of key contrast in the exposition which are later resolved in the recapitulation, as well as the tonally adventurous development searching for the lost key, are all in place. However this work opens not with an expected tonic chord, but with the unstable chord of the dominant seventh in its final inversion. This so catches the ear is that it would be easy to fail to spot the thematic importance of the repeated chords underneath the held note of the first violin. These chords have an important part to play in the motivic development of the movement, as the composer extracts ever more variety from them. Though the exposition is not monothematic, it is difficult to say at what point the opening material actually becomes the second subject, the music is so seamless and full of development. The development section, as well as developing the rhythmically defined motives, also modulates widely - sub-dominant, sub-mediante minor, supertonic, and mediant minor are all more or less established. The opening material returns as a false reprise in a foreign key, and by using this as a modulating sequence Haydn informs us of his true harmonic purpose. Perceptively, Paul Griffiths has drawn a parallel between the use of word-play by a child as a sign of understanding of language and Haydn's ability to create musical wit. In this movement we hear the composer working out the development of his initial idea from several different perspectives but in a simultaneous time-frame. All carried out beneath a smooth and totally convincing surface.

The second movement, though titled Scherzo, takes the musical character of a rather stylised and formal eighteenth century movement. The phrasing is regular, comprising a mix of 2 and 4-bar phrases. The charm of this regularity is an excellent foil to the complexities of the opening movement. The Trio, in the tonic minor, is almost as regular in its phrases, simple in its musical materials and predictable in its harmonies - a very charming movement.

The slow Largo is cast in a hybrid structure owing something to both sonata and rondo. The first theme recalls the rhythm and the melodic shape of a turn reminiscent of the opening of the whole quartet. This motive dominates the movement which moves to rich tonal relationships of the flattened leading note and the flattened mediant - truly distant modulations in Haydn's terms.

The Presto finale takes the form of a quick, rondo movement. The opening is light hearted with mercurial and quick moving music for the first violin. Though there is an early move to C minor in the first episode, it is the second in G minor that sticks in the mind and darkens the mood of the movement. However, this being Haydn, the seriousness is dispelled by the return of the opening which is then developed into ever increasingly fatuous versions, and the quartet ends with a surprising move to a pizzicato and simplified version of the main theme - a remarkable ending to a highly original and unusual work.

Dr Roger B. Williams Sept.2012

Variations on B.A.C.H. (in three movements)

Richard Worth (b.1966)

Bb, A, C, and B natural, or the spelling of BACH using German nomenclature (also found in Russia, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe).

This has always led me to wonder what happens in a jam session in Berlin; if you want to play 'rhythm changes' in Bb do you say: "Rhythm Changes in B", and does the stressed-out piano player look over at the bass player and say - "oh no, the singer wants to do 'Body and Soul' in H?" (probably not).

Anyway, what this notation system does do is give us this enigmatic set of notes; a row of semitones that doesn't readily fit into any standard tonal way of thinking, and for this string quartet each movement takes a different approach to the Bach signature.

Movement I turns the minor seconds into sevenths. Movement II transposes the signature, and then makes a series out of it, and III extends it: (Bb, A, C, B natural, D, C sharp) which can then be extrapolated to realise all three octatonic modes.

Yet again, I feel extremely fortunate to have the Edinburgh Quartet performing my music; since I have been at the University they have been long-suffering and able guides for the road I have been travelling along.

Richard Worth

Alla Marcia

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

This piece was originally part of the early work for an incomplete string quartet titled *Go play, boy play*. But for whatever reason Britten kept it back after its first performance in December 1933. Three years later a revision of the three movements had a very mixed reception. However, the music itself was subsequently reworked by the composer as the eighth song, *Parade*, in the work

Les Illuminations – settings of songs by the French poet Rimbaud, for high voice and strings. Completed in 1939, this was first performed in London in 1940. The original quartet music was again revived by the composer in 1974, and first performed in the following year in Snape. The freshness of the original invention is still retained and in the opening theme we see Britten beginning this piece with the viola - his own instrument. The piece has compositional strength and it was presumably his sensitivity to the original reception that led to his reluctance to accept this fresh and virile piece of his early compositions. Thank goodness we are now able to enjoy this highly inventive and effective piece for it is a significant and unique contribution to Britten's quartet writing.

Dr Roger B. Williams Oct.2012

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 CONCERT:

Friday 26 October

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Samantha Ward · piano

SCHUBERT Sonata in C minor D958

SCHUMANN Papillons Op.2

ADMISSION FREE