

# CONCERTS

## AT THE UNIVERSITY

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*SPRING—SUMMER 2015*

Tuesday 24 March 2015

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

### **The Edinburgh Quartet**

Tristan Gurney · violin

Gordon Bragg · violin

Ruth Gibson · viola

Mark Bailey · cello

**Programme of works by PURCELL and BEETHOVEN**



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
Edinburgh College of Art

## Fantazias Nos. 6, 8 and 11

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Henry Purcell, whose life overlapped with J.S. Bach by ten years, is still a neglected composer. Apart from his opera *Dido and Aeneas*, a small handful of anthems, the *Chaconne in G minor* and the 'Golden' Sonata, the majority of his music, though printed, is largely ignored. The string quartet had not been invented in his day but various consorts, for recorders, for mixed groups of instruments and, in particular, for viols, are examples of music written as much for the enjoyment of the players as for any audience.

The clear part writing of the Fantazias is well suited to the medium of the string quartet with only a few modifications. The French *Fantasia*, German *Phantasie*, or English *Fancie*, all refer to a work in which the imagination of a composer is given full licence to roam where it will. It was a form that emerged during the Renaissance period and may contain elements of imitation, either strict, as in fugue, or looser, as derived from the motet, and freely improvisatory elements – as in the many keyboard Fantasias by the Italian Frescobaldi.

Purcell's Fantazias seem to be early compositions and they are stylistically backward-looking, particularly influenced by Matthew Locke. Though passages of chromatics lend an anguished sentiment there is also an Italian influence. However the many dissonant inflections, with particular use of the mixed major and minor thirds at cadences, are Purcell's own.

Fantazia 6 begins on the upper voice with a characteristic long note and a downward leaping motive, accompanied by a different, more angular line, on the second voice down. After a slow central passage in which chromatics are explored, the final section is based on a rising motive, in itself is not very original, but the way that it is developed reveals Purcell's hand as a master of clear counterpoint. A short, slower coda ends the piece.

Fantazia 8 is cast in a minor mode, and in this piece we hear Purcell exploring the expressive possibilities of turning the initial theme upside down. Beginning with the third voice down, answered by the upper voice, there is again a slow, harmonious section, before a more extended third section is introduced by the lowest voice. It is interesting to note that the interval of a fourth with which this piece begins, is used throughout. Once again there is a short coda, based on this interval of a fourth.

Fantazia 11, once again in a major mode, exploits the idea of turning the initial motive upside down. The third and the upper voices rise while the lowest and the second voices fall. The central sections – marked 'drag' – again makes use of chromatics, while the final 'Brisk' section is more muscular in its lively rhythmic counterpoint.

Though this music may not have been originally conceived for string quartet, there is no doubt that it fits the medium particularly well, with the essential mixture of individual 'voices', or parts, melding into one organic unity. The sheer inventiveness, the lively rhythms and the expressive chromatic passages, makes these a most valuable contribution to the medium of the Fantazia.

RBW. March 2015

## String Quartet in G major Op.18 No.2

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro

Adagio cantabile

Scherzo - allegro

Allegro molto quasi presto

The six quartets of Opus 18, written between 1798 and 1800 and dedicated to Prince Lobkowitz, are Beethoven's first published essays in the form. Earlier chamber works had included string trios, but it was the turn of the century before Beethoven could write to his friend Carl Amenda "only now do I know how to write quartets properly".

Of the set, No. 2 in G major is the most light hearted, the best aware of classical objectivity and the one in which Beethoven looks back over his shoulder at Haydn and even Mozart. There is, but not all the time, a feeling of a divertimento.

The mood of the three movements is jocular and often witty. Even the slow movement has a fast section which seems to mock the cadence figure of the slow section. At the beginning of this Adagio the first violin is supreme, the other instruments being assigned an accompanying role, but, come the reprise, the cello takes the lead.

Points which may be of special interest are the appearance half way through the first movement of the opening theme in the remote key of E Flat – a darker shadow – and the main theme of the Finale also experimenting with E Flat and the A Flat. The start of the trio in the capricious scherzo is delightfully witty and the Finale abounds in arresting imaginative writing. When the work finishes, we can certainly consider ourselves to have been entertained.

George McVicar

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 giving over 50 concerts per year the Edinburgh Quartet is frequently featured in radio broadcasts for the BBC and other stations. Recently this has included live appearances on *Classics Unwrapped* (BBC Radio Scotland) and *Jazz Line-Up* (BBC Radio 3) as well as video recordings for *Studio One Sessions*, which appear on the BBC Radio Scotland website.

The Edinburgh Quartet 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.

The Quartet has always been a champion of new music and has worked with many important and prolific composers of our age including James MacMillan, Michael Tippett and Howard Blake.

The Edinburgh Quartet has an extensive discography available on various labels such as Delphian, Linn, Meridian and RCA. Among their recordings are the complete string quartets of Hans Gál (Meridian), Kenneth Leighton (Meridian) and Mátyás Seiber (Delphian), as well as discs of Bartók, Robert Crawford, Haydn, Schubert and Thomas Wilson.

Their recent release "Postcard from Nalchik" featuring Haydn, Prokofiev and Shostakovich received a four star review in *The Scotsman*, with Ken Walton commending the playing as "perky and pristine in the Haydn, gutsy and attitudinal in the folk-inspired Prokofiev, movingly sustained in the grim delights of the Shostakovich... richly considered, rigorously balanced and, ultimately, a musical treat" whilst their new James MacMillan disc (also on Delphian) received 5 stars in *The Scotsman* from Walton, was described in *The Herald* by Michael Tumelty as "absolutely essential listening" and was praised by *Gramophone Magazine*: "These players have worked to produce the precise sound to transmit the emotional import of each phrase".

[www.edinburghquartet.com](http://www.edinburghquartet.com)