
CONCERTS AT THE UNIVERSITY

Spring - Summer 2016

Tuesday 8 March 2016

1.10pm

City of Edinburgh Methodist Church

The Edinburgh Quartet

Tristan Gurney · violin

Gordon Bragg · violin

Simon Tandree · viola

Mark Bailey · cello

Programme of works by BARBER and GÁL.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

Adagio from String Quartet Op.11

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Of Samuel Barber, The Grove Dictionary of American music says that he was "never stylistically in the vanguard" and goes on to claim "Few American composers have seen such a high proportion of their works enter and remain in the repertory". Barber's output was large and varied with many song settings, chamber music and stage, orchestral and choral works. Of these however, only a few are regularly performed in this country. The song cycle - *Dover Beach*, some of the songs for voice and piano and the *Adagio for Strings* are foremost among the exceptions.

The Adagio was originally the slow movement of the string quartet Opus 11 written in 1936 and this, of course, is how the piece will be performed today. It was Toscanini who persuaded Barber to make an arrangement for string orchestra and introduced it to an admiring audience. Its long spun melodic lines and harmonic wealth are the attributes which have won the piece international favour.

Although two thirds of the way through, a crescendo builds to a climax, nothing in the nine minutes duration is allowed to disturb the solemn and elegiac mood.

Quartet No.1 in F minor Op.16

Hans Gál (1890-1987)

Moderato, ma con passione

Molto vivace

Adagio

Allegro energico, un poco sostenuto

Dedicated to Adolf Busch and first performed by the Busch Quartet - one of the most eminent String Quartets of the time - the four movements of Gál's Op.16 follow an established pattern, shared with sonatas and symphonies of the classical and romantic periods. The opening sonata movement has a contrasting second subject in the richly romantic and very Schubertian relationship of flattened submediant. What Schubert would not have done, however, is to recall this tune in the key of D major (a complex relationship of sharpened sub-mediante)

in the recapitulation. The central development section gives some hints of this forthcoming sleight-of-hand, in a series of surprising modulations. Despite these complexities, however, the movement is direct in utterance, varied in texture and admirably clear in form. The outline may be well established but the original material and the structure are welded together in an uninterrupted confluence.

The second movement is a fast-flowing scherzo in which the opening is remarkable for its many three-bar phrases, reminiscent of a rustic dance. This gives the music a slightly breathless feel and enables Gál to achieve a flexible variety of rhythmic impetus. There are two contrasting episodes, acting, though not marked, as Trios. Throughout this movement Gál varies his textures with *pizzicato* cello, tremolo upper strings, and for the coda asks all the players to play *sul ponticello* - a special, thinner and rather ghostly sound.

The slow movement takes up this other-worldly sound, with high harmonics on both violins, beneath which the viola and cello play an eight-bar tune. This begins in a mood which the Viennese would probably refer to as *gemütlich* - genial, comfortable - but as the theme develops, so does the intensity, as the melancholic effect of the key of a minor grows ever stronger.

The finale begins with a stormy statement of F minor before a rather odd theme takes hold. It is 'odd' because of not wishing to take itself too seriously. The generally simpler material of this finale is reminiscent of folk music with its direct and almost simplistic harmonies - particularly the cello line for the second subject. However, the appearance of simpler material is far from the whole story, as the composer proceeds to work with his various musical materials. The almost episodic nature fits well as a conclusion to the whole work, particularly as much of the melodic material derives from the initial theme of the first movement. The many different versions of this opening play an important part in drawing this remarkable first quartet to a conclusion - a conclusion which is as surprisingly understated as it is compositionally taut.

From this superbly well-crafted Quartet, we get a clear idea of why this very fertile composer, at the age of 26, became such an eminent figure in Vienna. The work is the composition of a young mind, flexing compositional muscles, teeming with ideas and working with a vast canvas of textures. Though the pedigree of the Quartet may be quite obvious, the working out is wholly individual, creating an original and attractive sound world, all its own.

Dr Roger B Williams

FORTHCOMING CONCERTS:

Thursday 10 March, 7.45pm, Canongate Kirk
Edinburgh University Renaissance Singers
Noel O'Regan (director)
Music from the time of Shakespeare by WILLIAM BYRD, ORLANDO GIBBONS,
THOMAS MORLEY and others.
£8/£5 tickets available on the door

Friday 11 March, 1.10pm, Greyfriars Kirk
John Kitchen (organ)
MARCHAND Dialogue sur les grands jeux
CLÉRAMBAULT Suite du deuxieme ton
ALAIN Le jardin suspendu
COR KEE Variations on 'Merck toch hoe sterk'
Admission Free

Friday 11 March, 7.30pm, St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Lutton Place
Edinburgh University Singers
John Kitchen (conductor)
Morley Whitehead (organ)
DURUFLÉ Requiem
and French motets
£8/£5 tickets available on the door

Friday 11 March, 7.30pm, Canongate Kirk
Edinburgh University chamber Choir
Robert Brooks (conductor)
'Love and Death'
BERTOLUSI Osculetur me and Ego flos campi
SAINT-SAENS Les fleurs et les arbres and Calme des nuits
MONTEVERDI Sfogava con le stelle and Dolcissimo uscignolo
PAUL SJOLUND Love Lost
ROBERT BROOKS Endymion
SHEPPARD In manus tuas I, II and III
PARRY Songs of Farewell
Tickets £10 (full price) / £5 (students/under 26s/concessions)