

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1956-57

Third Concert

THE NEW
EDINBURGH QUARTET

ROBERT COOPER
ANNE CROWDEN

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN
JOAN DICKSON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 22nd NOVEMBER, 1956
At 7.30 p.m.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

QUARTET No. 3

Tippett
(b. 1905)

Grave e sostenuto—Allegro moderato
Andante
Allegro molto e con brio
Lento
Allegro comodo

Michael Tippett's style is always predominantly though not exclusively contrapuntal. His contrapuntal technique derives ultimately from two quite distinct sources—from the eighteenth century conception of counterpoint where the distinctive rhythms of the several parts are nevertheless not so independent as to stand out against the steady logical march of the harmonic rhythm, and secondly from the polyphonic madrigalian counterpoint of Elizabethan era wherein there is lively and often most intricate interplay of independent rhythms changing their shape and emphasis from moment to moment. This latter style is generally pointed out as being most characteristic of Tippett, but in truth both basic styles are to be found.

In this third quartet, composed in 1946, four years after the better-known second quartet, three of the five movements (the first, third and fifth) are predominantly contrapuntal, using a fugal or quasi-fugal technique, whilst the second movement (Andante) maintains almost throughout a combination of two distinct rhythms—a slow moving melodic line (3/2) against a background in triple measure at twice that speed (3/4)—for, as every musician and every drill sergeant knows, 2 x 3 does not equal 3 x 2 in anything save the total count.

In the Grave introduction, the motive which is ultimately to prove of chief significance is that which emerges from the percussive reiteration of viola and violoncello, for it is to re-emerge in strength in the climax of the first phase of the ensuing fugal movement. This opens as a regular fugue with three countersubjects. In due course a bold second theme is reiterated by second violin and viola in octaves which leads to the first climax already mentioned. A second fugal exposition opens the middle section of the movement, leading again to the bold second theme, whereupon the music is hushed to a resumption of the Grave introduction continued in fugal epilogue.

In the Andante a short introduction, inaugurated as a momentary canon between the two lower instruments, leads to the high

tranquil melody of the violin sustained against the quicker triple measure of the accompanying instruments. At length the first part of the melody is taken up by the second violin. A varied repeat of the introduction leads to a repetition of the whole with the melody on viola and violoncello.

The Allegro molto which serves as scherzo is a vigorous and complex fugue which begins as a double fugue (i.e. with two subjects simultaneously) but soon proves itself to be in effect a fugue on four subjects. Stretto devices and inversion are boldly used herein.

The fourth movement is a highly emotional fantasia-like introduction to the finale, another highly contrapuntal movement of a pleasingly gigue-like character in which the tonality veers between C minor, E flat and C major.

INTERVAL

QUARTET IN E FLAT, OP. 127

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Maestoso—Allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile—Andante con moto—Adagio molto espressivo—Tempo I
Scherzando vivace—Presto—Tempo I
Finale : (Allegro)—Allegro comodo

The keynote of Thomas Traherne's philosophy was "Felicity"—a word which forms the title of one of his books of poems but which sums up the whole spirit of his "Centuries of Meditation". Traherne was but a young man when he found his sure peace of mind and the power to delight in God and the whole of God's creation despite the wickedness and tragedies of mankind. Beethoven was not an old man when he entered upon the mystical joys of his last five quartets composed in 1824-26. He was only in his middle-fifties, but his musical life and indeed his personal life had covered a vast field of elemental human experience, and in the contemplative wisdom with which these wonderful visions are infused there is the supreme and radiant joy as of a second childhood.

The mysteries of this mysticism are to be found rather in the three central works of this supreme sequence of five quartets. The E flat Quartet is as it were a glorious and radiantly joyful portal to this new-found land. It opens in solemn majestic strength with a proclamation twice repeated in the course of the movement, but

this is just the assurance granted to the very ecstasy of delight which throughout the whole work is to reiterate its melodies and the turn of its phrases with infinite variety but for ever content to be caught up in the fascination of a pure joyousness that nothing can dispel. Both in the first and last movements the melodies revolve with a wonderful ease of spirit, extended and repeated, whilst the moments of joyous acclaim have a superbly confident strength about them. The same infinite extensibility belongs to the glorious variations in A flat major which constitute the slow movement—perhaps the most wonderful enlargement and adornment of the wide spaces of the spiritual world which Beethoven ever attained by this means. The vitally alert Scherzo too is carried on the impetus of a short rhythmical figure reiterated time and again, now delicately light, now aggressively exuberant, but ever with a spirit of unfailing delight.

S.T.M.N.