

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1956—57

Seventh Concert

ROBERT MASTERS
QUARTET

ROBERT MASTERS
MURIEL TAYLOR

NANNIE JAMIESON
RONALD KINLOCH ANDERSON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 21ST FEBRUARY, 1957

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

PIANOFORTE QUARTET NO. 2 IN G MINOR (Op. 45) *Fauré*
(1845-1925)

Allegro molto moderato
Allegro molto
Adagio non troppo
Allegro

Of Gabriel Fauré's life it is unnecessary to say more than that after holding various posts as an organist he became professor of composition and later director of the Paris Conservatoire. Among his many famous pupils were Roger Decasse and Maurice Ravel. His songs, much of his chamber music and his Requiem have long been familiar in Britain. Since his last work dates from 1925, the year of his death, it is necessary to emphasise that Fauré must rightly be ranked with Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) and César Franck (1822-1890) as a pioneer of modern French chamber music. The first, and better known, pianoforte quartet in C minor does in fact date from 1879, being exactly contemporary with the pianoforte quintet of Franck which was one of the first fruits of that composer's amazing productivity during his latter years.

The G minor Quartet (1886) is a work of rich romanticism, which exhibits a maturity Fauré's peculiarly idiomatic chromaticism and use of enharmonic modulation, comparable indeed with the chromaticism and the modulatory enhancement of Franck's art, but markedly different and governed by a peculiarly subtle and personal slant of thought. Much use is made in the first two movements of that transformatory process of thought which in Franck yields the variable material for cyclic form. Here not only is the imposing and forthright opening theme of the first movement transformed into a gentle expressive feminine variant, matching the quiet second theme (so tentatively adumbrated on the viola in its first appearance), but both these themes reappear in the impetuous second movement—the scherzo—where the second theme assumes a boldly extrovert assurance whilst the first develops in an unexpectedly quiet air of mysticism, all upon a background of *moto perpetuo* that pervades the whole movement.

Fauré again uses the tentative approach in leading out the melody of his slow movement upon a setting which suggests the quiet murmur of muffled bells. But the underlying serenity and composure of this movement does not preclude the enjoyment of a rich garner of chromatic development caught upon the flood of sonorous ensemble.

The finale immediately adopts a somewhat sterner view of things, very effectively blunting its phrases to a G minor cadence whatever the nature of their momentary excursions, and very surprisingly choosing A minor as its Tom-Tiddlers ground in which to roll around with magnificent bravado before ceding to the normal territory of B flat for its long second theme. Later in the recapitulation that rolling bravado is transformed in an extensive pianissimo development upon all instruments in turn before its final proud parade at the end of the major coda.

PIANOFORTE TRIO IN B FLAT, Op. 97 ('Archduke')

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro moderato
Scherzo: Allegro
Andante cantabile ma però con moto (Variations)
Allegro moderato—Presto

Through Beethoven's dedication of the last of his six pianoforte trios (1811) to the Archduke Rudolf of Austria, this work has acquired the affectionate sobriquet 'the Archduke' amongst the devotees of chamber music, though no one seems to have reflected that with equal reason the name might be given to the last of the violin Sonatas (G major, Op. 96). But perhaps the association of the name is coloured by the splendid nobility of the work itself, apparent in the statement of its first theme by the pianoforte (solo). In the Waldstein Sonata Beethoven moved boldly to the mediant major as novel territory for all the secondary part of his exposition. Here, even more boldly, he has recourse to the submediant (G major)—a key that one might rather have looked for in the recapitulation—and again it is the pianoforte solo which introduces the new theme, though in the extension and development of both the strings bear a major share.

The opening of the Scherzo, with its happy riposte of violin to violoncello, momentarily suggests a movement of that Allegretto-scherzando type found in the two quartets, Op. 18, No. 4, and Op. 59, No. 1; but this soon proves to be a full-scale scherzo on the normal principle of alternation with contrasting trio-section, extended to a five-fold design with coda appended. (The trio is enhanced with some forthright prophecies of the part to be played by the Polonaise in the years to come.)

The theme of the variations is a radiantly beautiful song or hymn of serene composure—quietly but richly set out in full harmony. The succeeding variations progressively introduce quicker motion and more elaborate texture in the designs which adorn this theme in its progress, until a final simple restatement is extended in a coda to the threshold of the Rondo-finale.

The 'psychological moment' (if there is such a thing!) in any Rondo is the first moment of its first phrase whenever and however it recurs. The Fourth Pianoforte Concerto and the Op. 59, No. 2 Quartet afford famous illustrations of what can happen when a Rondo-theme starts off-centre or off-stage. Here Beethoven summarily points his theme away to E flat before it can say a word, for the sheer delight every time it runs happily back to heel.

INTERVAL

QUARTET IN C MINOR, Op. 60

Brahms

Allegro non troppo
Scherzo, Allegro
Andante
Finale, Allegro commodo

This, the last of Brahms' three pianoforte quartets to appear in print, is a work with a rather mysterious history. It is certain that a draft of the work, originally pitched in C sharp minor, was at least contemporary with the G minor and A major quartets published some dozen years before the appearance of

Op. 60. Further, Joachim when questioned several years later recalled that the first version had been "very diffuse". That in itself is sufficient to show that the work underwent great change. What must remain uncertain is the question whether that first draft went beyond the first movement. An attempt has, however, been made to trace the history of the work by D. G. Mason in his book *The Chamber Music of Brahms*.

So early as 1854, Brahms took Joachim the sketch of a quartet in C sharp minor consisting of three movements (without scherzo). It was rehearsed and laid aside for future criticism.

There is an entry in Clara Schumann's journal in the autumn of the same year, "Brahms has composed a wonderful Adagio for his C sharp minor quartet—full of deep feeling". That may be the movement we know, though there can be no certainty. One writer, Kalbeck, went so far as to suggest that the quartet as a whole reflects Brahms' love for Clara at the time of Robert Schumann's tragic death. However we may be disposed to view that suggestion, it is an unquestionable fact that Brahms always spoke rather oddly about the work—not that that was altogether exceptional in his behaviour. In a letter of 1868, he wrote of the first movement, "Imagine a man for whom is nothing is left and who wishes to put an end to himself." In 1874 when sending the manuscript to a friend he writes of it as "a curiosity—an illustration for the last chapter in the life of the man in the blue coat and yellow vest." The reference is to Goethe's Werther, type of the unhappy lover. Again, just before the publication of the work in 1875, he wrote to the publisher, "On the cover you must have a picture, a head with a pistol pointed towards it. Now you can form an idea of the music. For this purpose I will send you my photograph! Blue coat, yellow breeches and top boots would do well, as you seem to like colour printing."

Whatever the work may have been when he began his final revision of it, we know this much at least, that the key was altered and that a new finale was provided. On its completion Brahms wrote, "The quartet is half old, half new—the whole thing isn't worth much." The world, however, has thought rather differently about it.

The pianoforte's firm challenge of octave C's and the repeated mutter which it evokes from the brooding strings suggests some tragic symphony. Soon an avalanche of sound precipitates us into the grip of that fate in all its relentless force. The waves that alone seem to struggle for freedom are hushed of a sudden and gently bear to us the first phrases of the second theme which begins its song in great tranquillity in the key of E flat. It is an eight-bar phrase which is followed immediately by five variations.

The development is dominated by a thrill of triumph that transfigures the hard fatalism of the first theme, but for all the urgent and heart-melting pleading of the second theme in the strings the implacability of the first theme is hardened into terrific force in the recapitulation, against which not even that calm beneath the sunny skies of G major can in the end prevail.

With the first plunging octaves of the Scherzo an impetuous force is released which neither the tender Schubertian harmonies of the second theme nor the shining cloud that sails high over the middle section can distract from trampling its way towards a frenzied conflict for supremacy.

The slow movement (in E major) opens with one of the most glorious melodies that Brahms ever wrote. The whole spacious movement, which follows the design of sonata form, possesses a nobility and tenderness so unfathomable and so enduring that all thought is forgotten of the forbidding circumstances that lies about it.

The man who ventured to point out the similarity of the finale to some parts of Mendelssohn's C minor Trio met with the famous rebuff from Brahms, "Any fool can see that". A more helpful comparison for the understanding of the movement is made by referring to the G minor finale of Brahms' own G major Violin Sonata. The melodies are of the same pathetic caste and each possesses a persistent gentle ripple of pianoforte accompaniment. But here there is not only pathos but power. And finally peace and all its mysteries are found in a quiet chorale upon which the pianoforte scatters the gentle drops of a benediction.

S.T.M.N.