

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1956—57

Eighth Concert

THE NEW
EDINBURGH QUARTET

ROBERT COOPER

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

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REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 28th FEBRUARY, 1957

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

I. QUARTET IN B FLAT, Op. 76, No. 4
(The Sunrise)

Haydn
(1732-1809)

Allegro con spirito

Adagio

Menuetto. Allegro.

Allegro, ma non troppo—Più Allegro—Più Presto.

The six quartets which constitute Haydn's Op. 76 were composed about the year 1797, after Haydn's return from his second visit to England and shortly before he turned to the composition of "The Creation," when he was already about sixty-five years of age. Beside the present quartet the set includes the D minor, known as the *Quinten* or *Hexen*, the *Emperor* (with the variations upon the Austrian national anthem then recently composed by Haydn) and the D major with the famous Largo in F sharp.

The B flat quartet has been nicknamed "The Sunrise" on account of its remarkably sustained opening passage. But the fact that the movement is headed *con spirito* should be sufficient indication that the rosy-fingered morn will keep other hands busily employed. "Busy old fool, unruly Sun," exclaimed John Donne, and no doubt many another after him; and Haydn apparently was prepared to endorse the resolution of Marvell:

"Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run."

For the hush of dawn soon gives place to the commotion of a busy orchestral tutti which accounts for quite half of the movement. Yet is is the one motive that inspires the whole, and this is present in the dawning of the first melody which lifts itself gently and easily out of the sustained chords beneath.

In the Adagio, the simplest binary form is used as a basis for a free lyrical fantasia of the one theme, whose essence is contained in the first two-bar phrase. As this beautiful song develops, the lightest decorative veil is thrown about it.

The minuet is assuredly a Ländler with its marked *ein, zwei, drei*. The very original Trio, which follows without a break, accompanies its melody with a drone, but the appended phrases that fall away in unison with darkened tone and the sforzando accents together produce a curious metrical irregularity.

The Finale is one of the happiest of Haydn's rondos. Its very tuneful theme, although for a while asked to sober its speech to *mezza voce*, cannot yet suppress an occasional Highlander's "whoop." It shows itself to be a rondo theme by its early recurrence, now with an exuberant *forte*, after one of those passages wherein the shortest of short figures goes spinning round after itself like a dog chasing its own tail, and progress is held up until it chooses to abandon the game.

2. QUARTET IN A MAJOR, Op. 41, No. 3

Schumann
(1810-1856)

Andante espressivo—

Allegro molto moderato.

Assai agitato—Un poco adagio—Tempo Risoluto.

Adagio molto.

Allegro molto vivace.

Schumann first turned to the composition of chamber music at the age of thirty-two and, as his first work, produced a set of three string quartets, his only completed works in this genre. That he addressed himself in all seriousness to the mastery of what was for him a novel art is shown by the fact that he ordered the scores of all the Mozart and Beethoven quartets to re-study them some two months before he embarked upon his task. The measure of the concentration he brought to bear upon it is indicated by the fact that the three quartets were finished in about a month (the movements of the last, that is the present quartet, being dated July 18, 20, 21 and 22) and is further illustrated by the amusing tale of Schumann's having declined to accompany Mendelssohn on a walk because he was pre-occupied with them, upon which Mendelssohn remarked, "Oh! you could have been much better employed walking with us!" Schumann, who might well have passed remarks about black pots and kettles, dedicated the quartets to his tactless friend.

All these quartets seem to have undergone a good deal of subsequent improvement before the parts were published the following year. Not without reason critics and players have found some passages pianistic in style and treatment, but where this is not a fault of technique it amounts to no more than the demand for such suggestive treatment as the pianoforte can achieve *par excellence*, and to which a string quartet can readily adapt itself.

It is precisely such suggestive treatment which the first movement of this quartet demands above all. The tender sigh of regret which echoes almost throughout belongs to a mood something between tears and happiness, such as one might seek somewhere between the questioning mood of "In wunderschönen Monat Mai" and the tender simplicity of "An den Sonnenschein." Question and reply are reversed in the second theme so that the falling fifth is caught up happily in the flow of the melody played by 'cello and violin in turn. The material is disposed freely in sonata form, but being entirely without dramatic purport or content it should be heard as a single-hearted poem that varies in the intensity of its emotion.

One could imagine that the exquisitely tender treatment of the broken phrases that sigh their way through the second movement (F sharp minor) must have been affectionately treasured by Brahms. As they pass from violin to viola and back again one feels oneself absorbed in the indefinable mood of intermezzo, and even the variation of the whole paragraph by a figure of repeated notes hardly warrants any suspicion of the robust contrapuntal variation which follows. The third variation returns to the simple ways of the theme in a melodious song echoed between violin and viola in duet. The final variation proclaims itself with tremendous resolution and culminates in a truly superb show of strength followed by a quiet coda. Altogether this movement must be accounted one of Schumann's finest achievements.

The Adagio molto (in D major) is an extended song of eloquent beauty and fervent emotion, to which the warm tone of the solo viola contributes generously.

The finale is a vigorous rondo whose theme of jagged rhythms derives tremendous vitality from the syncopation upon which it thrives. The second episode if not the theme itself suggests that Schubert's 'cello quintet was amongst the scores which Schumann took out for study. The third episode (in F major),

marked *quasi trio*, has reminded some of a certain Bach Gavotte. But if a dance is in the air I venture to suggest that a sturdy polka would be more likely to fit the facts and the rhythm. However, the most surprising contribution of this episode is that is prompts the rondo theme to open the recapitulation in F major.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET NO. 2 (1945)

Ernest Bloch
(b. 1880)

Moderato

Presto—Moderato—Allegro molto—Meno mosso—
Allegro molto

Andante

Allegro molto—Passacaglia—Fuga—Epilogue (calmo)

Whilst it is true of the greater part of Bloch's music that, as Eric Blom has said, "there is in Bloch's creative equipment a certain preponderance of extra-musical thought over purely musical imagination," the observation is entirely inapplicable to this great quartet. The first three movements, whether in reflective fantasy as in the first and third movements or in the full vigour of impetuous rhythmical drive as in the second, adumbrate themes and the partial figures of themes which are to find their full significance and their full stature in the gigantic finale, which is the fulfillment of the whole. The relevance of much in the earlier movements is thus only fully revealed in the last.

For the analyst it is easier to identify some of the themes as first adumbrated in terms of their definitive forms and functions in the finale, but the true experience of the whole is that of the listener witnessing the progress of the music from first things to last things, catching glimpses of themes now tentative, now more clearly defined, now epitomised, now expanded and elaborated. Thus the very first decorative turn of the solo violin in its opening ruminative fantasy expands into a quiet sustained melody in the middle of the first movement, and reappears tentatively in the third movement, before it is blazoned out in the turbulently rhythmical opening of the finale and once again at the culmination of the fugue. The sighing sevenths twice heard in the first movement form a distinctive feature of the ultimate passacaglia-fugue subject, whilst the first ejaculatory phrase of the Presto delivers the opening of that subject, for the present employed under a number of guises, and this again is the main topic in the opening of the third movement. Nevertheless, each movement also contains material proper to itself, often of a sustained melodic character such as that introduced first by the viola in the Presto. The quiet melody in clear triple-measure introduced four times in the course of the third movement finds its apotheosis in the grand climax in which the final fugue culminates, when it succeeds the blazoned theme already mentioned and with its breadth and grandeur brings the great marathon of energy to the stance of a calm epilogue wherein this melody and the fugue are quietly entwined, and the ever-striving harmonies are at length resolved on a sure D major.

S.T.M.N.