

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1958—59

Eighth Concert

THE AEOLIAN
STRING QUARTET

SYDNEY HUMPHREYS
TREVOR WILLIAMS

WATSON FORBES
DEREK SIMPSON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 5th MARCH, 1959
AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

I. QUARTET IN B FLAT, Op. 74 ("The Harp")

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Poco adagio leading to
Allegro
Adagio ma non troppo
Presto
Allegretto con Variazioni.

This work is known as "The Harp" Quartet because of the striking effects of pizzicato arpeggio passages which are a feature of the first movement. The slow introduction starts *sotto voce* with an expressive figure which is immediately repeated and expanded in a long eloquent phrase; two steps of sequence, each ending with an abrupt 'forte' chord, are followed by a final phrase, making a slow chromatic approach to the Allegro.

The Allegro has a terse exposition—with a pizzicato figure starting the transition and a flowing semiquaver theme the second group. The development is concerned wholly with the first theme and the return to the Recapitulation is a broad passage of prolonged dramatic tension culminating in the famous pizzicato arpeggios. The large coda further exploits the harp-like pizzicatos in combination with a brilliant semi-quaver arpeggio figure in the first violin; this presently becomes the accompaniment to a final development of the first theme which rises to a sonorous climax.

The second movement is in Rondo form, starting with a gravely beautiful melody with subtle phrasing. The first episode starts in the minor and, after rich and beautiful modulations, returns very simply to the Rondo theme which is given in a lower octave with expressive melodic variation. The second episode steps straight into a darker key and consists of a single strain immediately repeated by the 'cello. A change to the minor mode initiates the return to the Rondo theme, starting in the octave *below* the previous re-appearance and with a new decorative accompaniment. A reminiscence of the first episode returns, answered by the last phrase of the Rondo theme, which disperses in quiet echoing cadences, closing "morendo".

The third movement is a vigorous scherzo of which the first strain is repeated and the second part—beginning with insistence on the rhythmic figure—branches out with bold modulations into two new and more melodic themes. The contrasting trio in the major opposes the rhythm of "three times two" to that of "two times three" in the scherzo, and runs mostly in two part counterpoint. Scherzo and Trio alternate twice and are completed by a coda which maintains the vigour of the rhythm in mysterious pianissimo with little thematic allusion.

The Finale is a set of six variations. The first three are progressively brilliant; the fourth presents the reaction of subtle simplicity, followed by a fifth with an arpeggio figure in the first violin over a severely simple rhythmic accompaniment. The final variation, in slightly faster tempo, is expressed pianissimo throughout and expands into a coda which blazes up into a brilliant ending.

M.G.

2. STRING QUARTET NO. 1, Opus 32

Kenneth Leighton
(b. 1929)

Con Moto
Lento Sostenuto
Allegro molto e ritmico.

Written in 1956, this work was commissioned by the B.B.C. in connection with the Tenth Anniversary of the Third Programme, and first performed in October of that year by the Aeolian Quartet.

The thematic material of the three movements is closely related, particularly by the melodic shape—G, A flat, G, A natural—which is heard in the opening tune of the first movement on the viola. The lyrical but restless mood of this first subject soon leads to a more agitated transition, and the second subject itself (again heard first on the viola) is in the same rhythmic vein. The development which follows begins with a return to the opening tune, now worked out in a more contrapuntal fashion, and the close relationship of the two subjects becomes apparent in the discussion that follows. The culmination of this takes fugal form, and over this the first violin is allowed to sing a more expressive version of the main subject.

The slow movement rises from a mysterious opening to a central impassioned climax, and is almost entirely lyrical. There are two subjects. The first (heard at the opening) is a slow descending or ascending motive in wide intervals. The second is a more expressive melody using close intervals, and uncurls itself in a way similar to the first movement theme.

The finale (except for a moment of relaxation just before the end) is "sempre energico". A new version of the "motto" provides the main material, and later in the movement there is a tug of war between duple time and triple time. The triple time wins in the end.

K.L.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET IN A FLAT MAJOR, Op. 105

Dvořák
(1841-1904)

Adagio, ma non troppo, leading to
Allegro appassionato
Molto vivace
Lento e molto cantabile
Allegro, non tanto.

Although the G major quartet appears as Op. 106, it was in reality completed before the quartet in A flat, which is therefore Dvořák's last chamber-music work. It was written for the most part on the composer's return to Czechoslovakia after a long stay in America, and when, it is said, he was "overflowing with joy and happiness" at returning to his own country for good. Every turn of phrase is expressed in the intensely individual style which Dvořák developed on the basis of the national idiom.

A slow introduction in the minor leads to the impassioned first movement which, like the whole quartet, has great warmth of "Romantic" colour. The first paragraph contains two ideas and a subsidiary figure (first appearing pizzicato) which later becomes important. The second "subject" is characterised by an exuberant rhythm and an irresistible flow to its climax. The development is relatively long, but the flow of the movement is maintained by the unexpected and masterly return which short-circuits much of the first group.

The Scherzo is in a fiery dance-rhythm with the cross-accent of a Furiant. The more lyrical middle section has a contrasting regular rhythmic accompaniment, and is extended by the second violin, which unexpectedly gives the whole of the first strain again; echoing cadences followed by a romantic diminuendo lead to a rousing return of the Scherzo.

The third movement might be said to contain the "essence of Dvorák" in the inexhaustible flow of its melodies. The middle section is accompanied by triplet rhythm and is more poignant, rising to an impassioned climax, after which the first section returns with lavish decorative details.

The main figure of the first theme of the Finale appears quietly in the bass, and eleven introductory bars usher in a lively theme which starts squarely, but becomes surprisingly elastic in rhythm; repetition of the first part is followed by a second strain which ends conclusively. Starting imitatively (led by the 'cello) a broad transition leads to a second theme with a smooth opening phrase and a rather unexpected sequel, which rises to a climax. Hints of the opening figure merely initiate another transition to a third theme starting in much the same mood (and unmistakably Czech expression) as the second, equally spacious, and in a darker key. The return again of the opening figure heralds a considerable development; and then—beginning pianissimo and minus the introductory bars—follows a complete and delicious recapitulation of all three themes. The coda further develops the characteristics of the first theme and ends (*piu mosso*) with a virtuosic climax.

M.G.