

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH  
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1959-60

*Third Concert*

THE NEW  
DANISH QUARTET

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REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 1959

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

## PROGRAMME

### 1. QUARTET IN E FLAT, Op. 64, No. 6

Haydn  
(1732-1809)

Allegretto  
Andante  
Menuetto : Allegretto  
Finale : Presto

Haydn's opera 54 and 55, each of three numbers, appeared in 1789, followed next year by the six quartets of Opus 64. All were dedicated to Johann Tost, consequently the complete set of twelve are often referred to as "the Tost Quartets." The best known of the Op. 64 set is No. 5 in D, "The Lark." Tovey couples No. 6 with it as "being specially popular," and his editor Cobbett adds, "Nos. 4, 5, 6 are among those most played." Times have changed, for whilst in my experience No. 3 in B flat is to be heard from time to time, the G major (No. 4) and the present quartet have, at least in Edinburgh, become rarities.

A striking feature of the Op. 64 set is Haydn's procedure of devising a whole movement basically upon one subject, as here in the opening Allegretto where the melody is liberally treated to contrapuntal and canonic devices, and also richly harmonised, notably in the depths of G flat major reached by a gloriously protracted sequential descent.

Another feature common to the set is the simple ternary design of the slow movement, with a middle section in minor tonality. Here the rich open arpeggio harmonies of the Andante are offset in the minor key by the simple reiterative harmonic accompaniment of a concertante-like solo violin.

The novelty of the Minuet lies especially in the instrumentation of its trio section where the first violin mounts into ethereal regions to sound his campanella.

The final rondo has as kittenish a theme as any in Haydn, but it also has quite enough contrapuntal ingenuity and dexterity to play Scarlatti's cat right off the keys, and also the humour to reserve the final snub for us wise mortals who believe we know everything about slow motion pictures.

S.T.M.N.

### 2. QUARTET No. 6

Bartók  
(1881-1945)

Mesto—Vivace  
Mesto—Marcia  
Mesto—Burletta  
Mesto

The Sixth Quartet is the last work which Bartók conceived and sketched out in Hungary before his enforced emigration to the United States in 1939. It thus belongs to a period of great personal

trial and crisis and marks the beginning of the final tragic episode in the composer's career.

The stylistic unity of the work is made clear by a beautifully constructed motto-theme, which appears as an introduction to the first three movements and in the finale blossoms out into an extended design of chromatic counterpoint. This theme contains all the intervallic shapes which go to make up the material of the four movements—the combination of semitone and whole-tone, semitone and third (major or minor), and semitone and fourth (perfect or augmented).

After a simple statement of the motto-theme on solo viola, the whole quartet announce the main theme of the Vivace in declamatory style and the first subject proper takes the form of a short phrase given to the first violin, and immediately built up into an extended contrapuntal paragraph. The second subject (in rather slower tempo and of a more lyrical nature) is characterised by three descending and three ascending whole tones; while a third theme uses only the semitone, in an ascending shape. The declamatory statement of the first subject returns before the development, which is in turn separated from the recapitulation by a pause.

The obstinate dotted rhythm of the March almost reminds one of Hindemith, but the melodic shape again points the contrast between the whole-tone and the semitone and a sustained and passionate melody rises magnificently over the march rhythm. The middle section has a new cantabile theme high on the cello, accompanied by tremolos on the violins and punctuated by rapidly plucked chords on the viola.

The spirit of Burlesque plays a considerable part in the late works of Bartók and nowhere is it more successfully expressed than in the third movement, with its bouncing rhythm and plunging melodic lines. Here the material of the motto-theme undergoes yet another unexpected transformation and the two violins are made to play out of tune with one another to enhance the humoristic effect. Equally unexpected is the brief middle section, which sings tenderly in a vein of childlike innocence.

The slow finale makes it clear that the total message of the work is one of high tragedy. The motto-theme, having explored so many diverse moods and modes of expression, seems to find its true self in this pathetic utterance, so characteristic of our time. It expands into an extended paragraph, interrupted only by a short wistful reference to the two main themes of the first movement.

There is no self-pity here but only a perfectly objectified expression of a deep spiritual experience. Like so many modern works, it ends with what might seem a disintegration of the musical material and finally with the opening notes of the motto played pizzicato on the cello, a progression unresolved and unanswered—perhaps the question mark which arises inevitably in the art of a composer of such burning sincerity and vision as Bartók.

K.L.

INTERVAL

Allegretto

Vivace

Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo

"Der schwer gefasste Entschluss": Grave—Allegro

When Beethoven headed the last movement of this his last quartet with the epitaph "The difficult decision," quoting its two main motives labelled as question "Must it be?" and answer "It must be," he seems to have posed a problem far more troublesome than any of Elgar's enigmas! Some, supposing Beethoven in his incipient last illness to have meant and known this to be his last work (though in fact a new alternative finale to the Op. 130 quartet was written after this), look upon this question and joyously resolute answer as signifying the composer's decision as to how he shall bring himself full circle and say his last say. Others tell tales of the landlady's bill to be paid—the last movement must be written to raise the wind, or of an importunate request for a Beethoven quartet "in the parts"—"must he pay for it?"—"he must!" To my thinking it is quite irrelevant to this music that Beethoven was ill and unusually difficult, in one of his "naughty boy" moods (as one writer puts it) or in need of cash, when he set about writing this work. The simple fact remains that the finale poses a question (words or no words) urgently and in great perturbation of spirit, and answers it resolutely and joyously and at the last tiptoes to Elysium with a final shout of exultation as the curtain falls. Whether this is autobiographical or no is of no real account. The only autobiographical significance is that the whole quartet is the aftermath to the three great quartets, Op. 132, Op. 130 and Op. 131—in relation to these the whole work is an epilogue. It has been said that "its imaginative significance is infinitely less" than that of the other late quartets. I cannot accept this at all. It achieves something not less but quite different from their profound and richly varied sphere of thought and emotion.

In the C major, Op. 59, No. 3, Beethoven began from the point of sheer void, nothingness, and answered this by seizing with exhilaration upon motifs and formulae that are more normally associated with the final celebrations of a spirited allegro. Here there is no mystery in the starting point but one must recognise that the opening Allegretto presupposes that one has already travelled to such a level of spiritual exaltation as one reaches, for example, in the last variation of the Diabelli, or found grace in the benediction of the A major Andante of Op. 131. It is not a case of "all passion spent" but all transfigured. Can the gods be bothered with landladies' bills, or with musical analysis? They laugh for sheer joy.

S.T.M.N.