

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1960-61

First Concert

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER

BRIAN HAWKINS

JULIAN CUMMINGS

IAN HAMPTON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 27th OCTOBER, 1960

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

1. QUARTET IN D MAJOR (K.499)

Mozart
(1756-1791)

Allegretto

Menuetto: Allegretto

Adagio

Allegro

For the reason that this Quartet (sometimes styled 'the Hoffmeister' after its original publisher) is the only one which falls outside the groups of the six quartets dedicated to Haydn and the three which Mozart completed of the intended set of six written for King Frederick William II of Prussia, it receives perhaps far less consideration than it merits. For it has indeed a very special character, different from that of any of the quartets in either group, though prophetic in some respects of the Prussian quartets. As Einstein has said, "It is worthy of its solitary position." The generous ease and amplitude of the whole is epitomised in the span of the opening unison theme which, as Abert says, "is treated in a way that practically excludes all secondary themes. It recurs again and again, quite unexpectedly . . ." Mozart, in fact, is moving away from the alert contrasts of the dramatic style and the idiomatic phraseology of opera into the wide terrain of monothematic design, and the experience which he here so richly enjoys was to have a lasting effect upon his later works for string ensemble. It is natural that monothematic designs should seek the enrichment of generous modulation, a process which here brings Mozart astonishingly close to Schubert both in utterance and in spirit. The same generous spirit fills the Minuet and overflows in the quasi-canonic response of viola to violin in its last bars. To this the D minor Trio, despite the comparative simplicity of its opening, provides a contrast of considerable contrapuntal complexity.

The Adagio (in G major) is a gloriously spacious movement, serene and deeply moving, and bearing a wealth of expressive detail adorning its ample phrases. The final Allegro, still maintaining a certain relaxation and ease, nevertheless brings with it some stronger contrasts, and touches of merriment from opera buffa emerge in a highly organic design which owes at least as much to the temperament of Rondo as it does to the habits of Sonata form.

S.T.M.N.

2. QUARTET No. 3

Bartók
(1881-1945)

The Third Quartet (1927), like the Fourth (1928), belongs to Bartók's middle period, and is a supreme example of the intense and uncompromising nature of his genius. He had reached full maturity as a composer, and nationalistic elements had been completely absorbed into his musical personality. Although these elements are easily recognisable in the melodic and rhythmic shapes, the pure concentration of the music absolutely transforms their essential nature. As well as being the shortest in length, this is also the most compact of the six quartets, and demonstrates well one of the most remarkable aspects of Bartók's achievement—the complete identity of strict structural logic with the highest intensity of expression.

The work has no break but is divided into four distinct sections called *Prima Parte*, *Seconda Parte*, *Ricapitolazione della Prima Parte* and *Coda*. The first part opens with a quiet and expressive melody on the first violin. This is immediately developed contrapuntally, but the main element (a rising fourth followed by a falling third—or the notes G C A) does not appear until the sixth bar. The treatment is canonic, and the paragraph is abruptly terminated by three loud chords, which declaim the motto G C A. A number of short sections follow, each rapidly developing the material in a new way with swift changes of mood, and often using a high degree of polytonal dissonance. Finally the music settles down into a simple diatonic phrase in C major sung by the viola and second violin in octaves. But the tension is still present in the accompanying harmony.

The Second Part is a fine example of Bartók's taut and exciting rhythmic style. The theme (notice the familiar upward and downward scale) is heard first in the form of pizzicato chords on the 'cello, but soon the first violin transforms it into a racy tune in unequal rhythm. The development that follows proceeds by means of canonic devices (as is so often the case with Bartók) and the section culminates in a rapid fugato on a new transformation of the theme. Bartók would seem to have screwed up the nervous tension to the limit; yet the climax is still to come in the dramatic passage that follows—a series of long glissandi and violent ejaculatory fragments. As happens also in Stravinsky, the sense of climax is achieved not by the normal means of extension, but by compression and disintegration.

The Recapitulation is more restrained, and the motto is given little chance to expand. Finally this mood of restlessness gives way to the Coda, which recapitulates the high-speed material of the

Second Part. The excitement is increased by telescoping the rhythmic shape of the theme, and by extending the remarkable glissandi over two octaves.

K.L.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET IN A MINOR, Op. 51, No. 2

Brahms
(1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo

Andante moderato

Quasi Minuetto, moderato—Allegretto vivace—Tempo I

Finale: Allegro non assai

Brahms was as slow to commit himself publicly in the field of the string quartet as he was to launch his first symphony. But there had been essays and sketches in plenty. It has been said of Beethoven that he reached assurance in the quartet only through the experience of composing string trios and quintets. Brahms certainly had produced two wonderful string sextets and a string quintet (eventually transformed into the Pianoforte Quintet) long before he was able to satisfy himself as to the finished product of his first two string quartets (C minor and A minor) which appeared in 1873 as Op. 51, and this only after he had tantalised Clara Schumann and Joachim for about four years with a foretaste of this or that movement.

The fullness of his quartet writing no doubt owes something to Brahms' earlier experience in the richer medium of the larger ensembles. If double stopping is employed here only to a moderate extent (apart from the strong full chording so prominent in the finale), yet the viola part is something of a *locus classicus* of difficult arpeggio accompaniment.

No attempt can be made in this short note to set out the design of each movement of this great work in detail. Of the whole it may be observed that all its movements are based on the same tonic. The main movements are in the minor whilst the contrasting major colouring is provided by the luxuriant Andante, and in the third movement by the nimble *vivace* episodes which alternate with and magically compound with the wistful Quasi Minuetto that seems to echo the spirit of Schubert's "*Schöne Welt wo bist du?*" (as does the Minuet of Schubert's own A minor quartet.) The serious determination and bold emphasis of the exuberantly high-spirited finale alternate with a resonant lyrical episode in a rondo design somewhat unusual in the economy of its inner structure.

S.T.M.N.