

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1961-62

Third Concert

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER
JULIAN CUMMINGS

BRIAN HAWKINS
IAN HAMPTON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 23rd NOVEMBER, 1961

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME: ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

1. QUARTET NO. 4 IN F (Op. 44) Carl Nielsen
(1865-1931)
Allegro non tanto e comodo
Adagio con sentimento religioso
Allegretto moderato ed innocente
Finale—Molto Adagio. Allegro non tanto, ma molto scherzoso

All of Nielsen's six String Quartets are works of his youth and early manhood. The last of this group—the Quartet in F major—was composed in 1906 and first numbered Op. 19. It was revised later on, re-numbered Op. No. 44 and eventually published in 1923. The original version had the title 'Piacevolezza' (amiability), and the first movement the programmatic title 'Allegro piacevole ed indolente'. These titles were later replaced by the slightly programmatic headings to the movements in the published score. Nielsen may have skilfully exorcised the elements of 'indolence' from his score, but he certainly retained its amiability which suffuses three of the four movements, and whose most lovable formula can be found in the rambling mood of the first movement. It is only in the 'religious' Adagio with its chorale-like chords and its exploitation of ecclesiastical modes that a more serious note is sounded. Typical fingerprints of Nielsen's mature instrumental style can only be discovered sporadically—as in the whimsicality of the humouristic passages in the Finale which, according to Nielsen's biographer, Robert Simpson, belongs to the period of the opera 'Maskarade.' The charming tunefulness and folktune-like 'innocence' of the Allegretto suffers also some interruption by Nielsen's habitual Poltergeist.

Seen as a whole, this Quartet is no introduction to the idiom of the 'Sinfonia espansiva' written five years later. It rather underscores Nielsen's link with German and Nordic Romanticism of the nineteenth century, creating a late world of idyllic make-believe shortly before the advent of the great symphonies.

2. STRING QUARTET NO. 2 (1928) Leos Janáček
'Intimate Letters' (Listy duverné) (1854-1928)
Andante
Adagio
Moderato
Allegro

The 'Intimate Letters,' Janáček's second String Quartet, composed five years after the first Quartet (inspired by Tolstoi's 'Kreutzer Sonata'), was to be his very last work. He wrote it in the early weeks of 1928, following hard on the heels of the com-

position of his last opera, based on Dostoyevsky's novel 'From a House of the Dead.' Like its Tolstoi-inspired predecessor, this Quartet becomes the vehicle of human passion. It was inspired by Janáček's love for a young woman—Kamilla Stossl—an emotion which tinged his creative processes during the last decade of his life. Originally he wanted to call the String Quartet 'Love Letters.' Soon, however, he withdrew this title in order to prevent a profanation of the most precious secret of his existence. 'Our love will be in it . . . the impression when I saw you for the first time! . . . Today I have written down in sounds my sweetest longing . . . I am struggling with it . . . My longing remains victorious . . . These are sentences taken from his letters to the real dedicatee, and they express something of the fierce ecstasy and visionary surge which permeate this extraordinary work.

The introductory motif of the first movement and its ambling consequent in the viola have a kind of leitmotif character. They reappear at the very end of the slow movement which revolves around a pensive motif in the viola (which in Janáček's original draft should have been even a viola d'amore). The 9/8 metre of the third movement with its repetitive short 3-note motif is as characteristic for Janáček, a past-master in spinning out motif-particles to symphonic length, as it is reminiscent of melancholy Russian folktunes, which remain an important element in his creative subconsciousness. The last movement begins polka-fashion throwing up an exuberant 4-note triplet motif with scintillating trill-like mordants. In the end these triplets swamp the polka rhythm, elevating the music to soaring heights.

The Quartet was first played in Brno on September 11th, 1928, only a few weeks after the composer's death. Together with 'Katja Kabanova,' 'Taras Bulba' and the 'Sinfonietta,' it belongs to the select group of works which vividly express the mystery of Janáček's eternal youth.

INTERVAL

3. SIXTH STRING QUARTET Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)
Mesto—Più mosso, pesante—vivace
Mesto—Marcia—Animato molto agitato—Tempo 1
(Marcia)
Mesto—Burlletta
Mesto

Bartók's sixth and last String Quartet was begun in Saanen, Switzerland, in August 1939 and completed in Budapest in November of that year. It was composed immediately after the Divertimento for String Orchestra commissioned by Paul Sacher on

whose estate Bartók lived when conceiving the String Quartet. That latter work should have been performed by the New Hungarian Quartet, but was eventually first performed by the Kolisch Quartet, to whom the published score is dedicated, in New York in January, 1941. The work was written, as it were, in the shadow of war and its mood is fiercely valedictory and emphatically Hungarian. It shares with other works of that period—like the Violin Concerto and the Divertimento for Strings—the classicist stability of style and the return to processes of musical thought heading towards more traditional concepts of tonality. This mood of mellowness and relaxed tension, however, is here (as in neighbouring works) occasionally interrupted by intermezzi of sarcastic humour. The Quartet's violent contrasts of tempo and occasional culminations into unison passages of great vigour remind one of the quartet style of the late Beethoven.

Each movement is prefaced by a recurring melody, given out first soloistically by the viola, and every time headed by the indication 'mesto' (sorrowful). This is one of Bartók's most beautiful and typically Hungarian melodies, and the very presentation of it, with its subtle inflection of chromatic harmonies, is the measure of his final mastery of style. These 'mesto' sections represent, as it were, Bartók's final farewell to the world he believed in, and which was crumbling to pieces when he set out for the United States of America only a few months after the completion of the score. Especially the last movement, which is entirely determined by the 'mesto' idea, sounds like the agonised cry of one who knows for certain that he will never return to his homeland. As Bartók's American biographer, Halsey Stevens, has suggested, that movement could most fittingly be headed by Dante's inscription above the entrance to the underworld: 'Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate.'

The grotesque 'Burletta' with its quartertones and glissando effects may poke bitter fun at Stravinsky's jazz idiom, the March with its nocturnal serenade as a Trio may owe something to Beethoven's Op. 130, the very first unaccompanied solo viola may recall the similar beginning of another valedictory work, Mahler's Tenth Symphony—viewed as a whole, this last String Quartet is perhaps Bartók's most personal message at a time when he had given up all hope for the return of this world to sanity.

H.F.R.