

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1961-62

Eighth Concert

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER
JULIAN CUMMINGS

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REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 22nd FEBRUARY, 1962

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

LUDWIG van BEETHOVEN

(1770-1827)

1. QUARTET IN D MAJOR, Op. 18, No. 3 (1801)

Allegro
Andante con moto (B flat major)
Allegro (D major, with middle section in the minor)
Presto.

2. QUARTET IN E FLAT, Op. 74 (1809)

Poco adagio—Allegro
Adagio
Presto
Allegretto con Variazioni.

Beethoven composed this quartet some two years after his completion of the set of three known as the Rasoumovsky quartets. It is comparable in several respects with the last of that set, the C major, especially in the manner of its approach through a purely tentative phase. There Beethoven reduced his thought to the state of the house swept and garnished awaiting the tenancy of a new occupant, and then in a moment realised his new-found freedom and entered upon it. In fact after the first moments the C major virtually begins where other works end. Now the opening of the E flat quartet has much the same effect but with this difference. Instead of reducing thought to a blank Beethoven is searching quietly for the mood and theme he is to adopt, and these are anticipated both in the form of his questioning and in moments which virtually affirm the answer.

As for its nickname, "the Harp" was obviously prompted by the instrumentation of the passage in which Beethoven prepares the recapitulation in the first movement. Any arpeggio under the sun should suggest a harp if it is true to its name; the arpeggios that Beethoven uses here are truer than most in that they are played pizzicato. But far more important than to single out this passage is to realise the relevance of its scoring to that of the whole movement. It is scored largely in the lightest colours, with many effects of pizzicato, of harmonies maintained with a dancing staccato, or fluted to the softest sounds. We have also the effects as of bell strokes leaving their murmur of harmonics hanging in the air which is reminiscent of passages in the first Rasoumovsky. But along with all this the movement has its more robust expressions of joy.

The A flat Adagio is a movement of sublime beauty which revives a whole world of associations. The generous emotional wealth of this key, whose happiness is always tinged with an element of sadness, is to be measured in a succession of movements from the time of Bach onwards. Time and again we find that the character of the key is most eloquently expressed by stress upon the third of its chord. This also we can find in Bach, in the prelude of the Forty Eight Book II and in the St. Matthew Passion, as in Mozart too, e.g. in the better known of the two organ fantasias. With Beethoven the key is so used almost without exception—to cite a few well known examples, the Pathetic Sonata, the Op. 27 and Op. 110

sonatas, the Fifth Symphony, and in the C minor Violin Sonata. The slow movement of the latter in fact resembles this quartet movement both in the rondo-like recurrence of its theme to varied florid accompaniments of increasing motion and in the vistas of thought in which it loses itself in its last visionary moments. It is interesting to note also that the first instinctive reaction to the key leads in so many cases straight to the minor mode. Thus here the first episode is a plaintive melody in A flat minor, against which is offset the second episode in the rich and sonorous tonality of D flat.

The succeeding Scherzo, planned on a fivefold scheme of alternation, lives by the "elate metre" of its rhythms. The listener must be prepared to preserve the pulse of a triple beat in his mind throughout the most forceful delivery of the rhythm which may seem to belie it. But the movement is headed *leggiermente* and for much of the time its rhythm dances ahead in lightest measures. Not so the trio. This marches us off on the instant with tremendous exuberance into all the exultation of the fugal finale of the C major Rasoumovsky. The Scherzo on its third appearance confines itself to *piano* throughout and shades away into *pianissimo* leaving us expectant on the brink of the finale.

This consists of a theme and six variations culminating in a coda which rings down the curtain with that show of increasing excitement that anticipates applause. These variations call for no analysis with the exception of the sixth. This very beautiful variation is grounded upon pedal notes, but displaces the harmonies from their normal positions.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET IN C SHARP MINOR, Op. 131 (1826)

Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo—
Allegro molto vivace—
Allegro moderato—
Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile—
Presto—
Adagio quasi un poco andante
Allegro.

The quartet is in seven movements which are designed to follow one another without interruption of any kind. Two of these however are by way of preface to succeeding movements. No less remarkable than the continuity of the whole is the perfection of the cycle of forms comprising Fugue, Binary (Suite) Form, Recitative, Variation, Rondo-Scherzo, Lied and Sonata Form. The circle of keys employed is also remarkable: C sharp minor, D major, F sharp minor, A major, E major, G sharp minor, C sharp minor. But the most important aesthetic fact is the pysical progression from the mystic serenity of the Fugue, through the lilting pleasure of spiritualised dance, the profound and radiant joy of the Andante, the utterly carefree exhilaration of the Scherzo, to the sobering moment of the introductory Lied to which succeeds a finale whose combination of vital resolute activity, exhilaration, compassion and reflection comprises such a subtle personality as might be expected rather in the first than the last movement. But there is the point. This quartet is surely a progression back to the normal active person after the supreme effort of the conflict in the Grosse Fugue (the original and, as I believe, the essential conclusion of the Op. 130)—a conflict as of Joseph with the angel.

The opening Fugue moves gently forward, ever circling about the axis of repose. All that analysis might point to as the device of contrapuntal art, diminution which brings a gentle breeze of animation, changed accent which forges the chains of new melodies, augmentation and stretto—all these express the perfection of the self reliance attained.

The cadence of the fugue lifted a semitone floats away into a dance of ecstasy whose lilting measure, now rising to exuberant joy, now falling to quiet hesitancy, can be trod only by the spirit that has known the Elysian plains. The fateful motive of the Great Fugue is itself transfigured as a song of radiant happiness.

The questioning recitative finds its first answer in the rich freedom of the variations, sublime with a gentle ecstasy that can be sought elsewhere only amongst Beethoven's greatest variations, such as the Pianoforte Trio Op. 97, the Sonatas Op. 109 and Op. 111, and the Diabelli. The theme whose phrases fall from one violin to the other in unbroken succession is already varied in the repetition of each of its two sections, and this constant progressive variation in the written out repeats is characteristic of the whole set. In the graces which adorn the latter part of the second variation one feels a thrill as of returning spring. The third quickens to a measured scherzo wherein arpeggios stretch out on either hand as far as the arms can reach. The fourth reveals its mysteries in canon at the second to which a second purposive figure marching upward with deliberate trills adds a sense of resolution. The graceful ease of the scherzo variation is generously enlarged in the fifth (Adagio), whilst in the sixth rhythm and melody are obscured to the point where only a harmonic schema remains. If ever man achieved the embodiment of the philosophers' "universal" it is here. The succeeding Adagio variation with the fulness of its swaying triple measures is of such a beauty as must heal all sores. It is followed by an extensive coda of fantasia which between moments of reflection upon the simple allegretto melody falls to trilling with the ecstasy of lark song, until the tender phrases uncoil and dissolve, to vanish at the touch of pizzicati.

The following Presto is a scherzo with a five-fold scheme of alternation. Its dancing theme is itself a rondo perpetually drawing itself up to look questioningly over the brink and slipping back into its carefree measure. The trio section consists of two melodies of divine simplicity, the second of which sings ever onwards in four-bar phrases of unexpected accentuation. In such intervals as the dancing accompaniment can detect it entertains itself in a relay of rapid exchange, whilst the *da capo* is tackled by means of a conundrum of pizzicati which proves to have a different solution when it is proposed a second time. For a third time the trio melodies suggest themselves, but the scherzo theme dancing with lightest touch in the high octave intervenes and descends to put an emphatic end to the revelry.

The expressive song of the Adagio sobers the mood and prepares a way for the Allegro finale, which seems to proclaim "wherefore let a man rejoice in his own work," for the theme of conflict is tensely uttered and accepted in exultation. The theme of the opening fugue is transformed to a song of compassion, and amidst the busy scene of work pursued with a ready will there come moments of mystic contemplation which retire from the turmoil only to find refreshment for the task of proclaiming a triumphant joy fashioned out of the stuff of adversity.

S.T.M.N.