

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1962-63

Third Concert

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER
JULIAN CUMMINGS

BRIAN HAWKINS
IAN HAMPTON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 22nd NOVEMBER, 1962

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

1. QUARTET IN C MAJOR, OP. 54, No. 2

Haydn
(1732-1809)

Vivace
Adagio
Menuetto : Allegretto
Finale : Adagio—Presto—Adagio

The four movements of this great quartet (composed in 1788) are all written in the key of C, but the Adagio with profoundly moving effect juxtaposes the sombre depths of the minor mode to the exceptionally spacious brightness of the opening Allegro, and in the third movement the trio reverts to the same contrast in modality, most poignantly transforming and echoing a strain from its gentle and careful Minuet. The Adagio is indeed one of the most deeply inspired and freely conceived passages in all Haydn's works. Admittedly its formal structure is simple enough—a sustained melody of eight-bar phrases, harmonised with some sonority, of the simple design AABA. But after the first phrase, the first violin, leaving the other instruments to sustain this melody, is inspired to extemporise with the utmost freedom and spontaneity a most profoundly eloquent and moving fantasy of decorative device. (Although not dissimilar to the decorative device *per figuram retardationis* which Haydn employed in the Adagio of the great F minor Quartet, Op. 20, No. 5, the conception here is far bolder whilst the rhythmical freedom of the line here taxes the resources of musical notation to a quite exceptional extent.)

The Finale opens with an Adagio which might at first suggest itself as being but an introduction to a sustained Presto. But, in fact, the Presto proves to be a brief episodic taste of a might-have-been Rondo, whilst the Adagio unfolds on spacious lines carried upon the broad arches of violoncello arpeggio whose spans reach from the depths of diapason C to the topmost heights of the harmonic structure. Here again emotional contrast is found in turning directly to the minor mode.
S.T.M.N.

2. QUARTET No. 3

Ernest Bloch
(1880-1959)

Allegro deciso
Adagio non troppo
Allegro molto
Allegro

The compositions of Bloch tend to stand apart from much of the music of his contemporaries. He did not associate himself with a school of composition, a group of composers or a technical system, such as are to be seen in the music of the inter-war years, but instead aimed to be true to himself, and also, as it were, to assume the mantle of a musical prophet. He was a great believer in spiritual values and held that the universal idea must prevail. As he stated shortly before he wrote the first of his five string quartets, "I hold that it is of the first importance to write good, authentic music—my own music. It is the Jewish soul that interests me, the complex, glowing, agitated soul that I feel vibrating throughout the Bible . . . the freshness and naivety of the Patriarchs; the violence

of the prophetic Books; the Jew's savage love of justice; the despair of the Ecclesiastes; the sorrow and the immensity of the Book of Job; the sensuality of the Song of Songs." Whereas certain of his earlier works, such as the 'Israel' Symphony, 'Schelomo', 'Baal Shem' and the Sacred Service were inspired by specific aspects of the Jewish faith, without being founded on traditional Hebrew melodies, in later works Bloch avoided drawing attention to the source of his art in titles to his works. Nevertheless it is clear that he still remained in essence a Jewish composer. His Swiss origin and his adoption of United States citizenship are of little importance in relation to his art.

In his string quartets and 1st Piano Quintet he avoided the rhapsodic lines of melody of some of his most characteristic Jewish music, favouring instead the use of a basic motto theme to serve as the focus of his musical thought. In the 3rd Quartet the motto, an angular motive consisting of three descending fifths in crotchet rhythm, is heard at once announced by the four players in octaves. It is significant that the keys of the four movements, A minor, D minor, E (Phrygian mode) and A minor, in themselves derive from a pair of descending fifths, A-D, E-A. The motto theme is heard in all the movements, either as main or subsidiary material, and because of its shape and rhythm is easily identified, even when the intervals are enlarged, diminished or inverted. This comparatively short work, which was dedicated to the Griller String Quartet, is more concentrated than the two earlier quartets.

The first movement is written in a rather free sonata form, with the motto, a triplet figure (D sharp, A, E, D sharp), and a dotted rhythm as the most important elements of the first subject. An emphatic chordal motive is first heard in the transition. The brief second subject melody is Phrygian on its first appearance, but not subsequently.

After a few introductory bars for viola and 'cello that influence other parts of the Adagio, the first violin announces the main theme of this movement. This is an orientally coloured melody using a scale containing two augmented seconds, and including some falling fifths, but the motto is not heard unambiguously until several bars later. A quiet contrasting section follows that leads on to a return of the motto theme and a climax, after which the movement quietly ends with reminders of the themes already heard.

The scherzo is a fantastic dance in the opening bars of which a Phrygian theme with distinctive rhythm rises rapidly through an octave and subsides more gradually. The interval of an augmented fourth (or diminished fifth), already foreshadowed in the first movement's triplet motive, is also prominent in this movement. In the Trio the motto is heard against a mysterious background of chromatically shifting harmonics, and is then played itself in harmonics. The viola presents an important new theme in natural harmonics. After a reminder of the introduction to the slow movement a shortened version of the motto is heard against quietly throbbing triplet chords.

In the finale themes from earlier movements serve as the basic material: an extended version of the motto theme heard in the opening bars, and later given clearer rhythmic definition, with the rhythm of the scherzo theme and the viola theme from the Trio as secondary motives. A diminution of the motto theme becomes the subject of a fugal exposition, and this is followed by a free double fugato on the motto and a second subject, the motto being heard inverted when played by the 'cello. Direct and inverted statements of the motto, loudly proclaimed, bring the work to a triumphal close in A major.

J.C.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET IN A FLAT MAJOR, OP. 105

Dvorak
(1841-1904)

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

Although Dvorak began composing his A flat Quartet in 1895 at the end of his stay in the United States, he broke off when he had just begun to sketch the development of the first movement. On returning to his native land he at first had no wish to resume composition, but preferred instead to enjoy the beauties of the countryside that he missed so sorely during his long absence. Two days before Christmas he wrote in this happy vein: "Praise God we are all well, and we rejoice that after three years we can again spend a delightful and happy Christmas in Bohemia. It was so different last year in America, where we were so far away in a foreign land and separated from all the children and friends! However, the Lord has granted us this blissful moment, and therefore we are all inexpressibly happy. Now I am very industrious. I work so easily that I couldn't wish for anything better. I have just finished a new quartet in G major (Op. 106) and now I am coming to the end of a second in A flat; I have completely finished two movements already, I am just writing the Andante, and I think I shall finish the work after the festival."

The Quartet in A flat, which bears a lower opus number than the G major Quartet, was thus the last of Dvorak's fourteen string quartets to be completed. It is one of his best works for this medium, and contains one of his finest scherzos.

The groping introduction to the first movement throws the relative brightness of the Allegro appassionato into relief. The first subject comprises two contrasting elements, the first derived from the introduction and the second a melody with drooping sevenths, but each ends with a similar quintuplet, which together with other elements is important in the development. In the recapitulation Dvorak successfully short circuits the first subject.

The scherzo, in which $3/4$ and $3/2$ rhythms succeed one another and are combined together, is a very characteristic example of an idealized *furiant*, a lively dance of Bohemia. The tail of the opening phrase, which becomes the head of the following section, evidently reminded the composer of his opera "The Jacobin", written seven years earlier, for the first violin quotes from this before long, and three-quarters of the way through the Trio a different quotation from the same opera occurs, rising quietly, mainly by semitones at first, over a sustained chord for the lower strings.

In the finely melodious *Lento* the phrases take on a new character when repeated through the addition of counter melodies and changes in scoring. In the middle section Dvorak reaches out into new harmonic colouring by means of pedals and chromatically descending appoggiaturas. When the first section returns it is entrancingly scored and reaches a finely impassioned climax.

The finale is curious in being an example of sonata form that has three 'subjects'. There is a principal theme, a transition theme which the cello presents unaccompanied, a second subject in the dominant initiated by the first violin, and a 'third subject' that combines quavers and triplets and contains an echo of the Violin Sonatina, which appears in G flat major and is later recapitulated in the subdominant. The work is brought to a brilliant conclusion.

J.C.