

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1963-64

First Concert

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER

BRIAN HAWKINS

JULIAN CUMMINGS

IAN HAMPTON

with COLIN HAMPTON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 10th OCTOBER, 1963

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

PROGRAMME

1. STRING QUINTET No. 70 IN E flat (Op. 47)

Boccherini
(1743-1805)

Moderato assai

Grave

Tempo di Minuetto

Finale : Allegro ma non Presto

Luigi Boccherini, born at Lucca in 1743, was a precocious violoncellist, who proved himself one of the foremost virtuosi of that instrument in the second half of the eighteenth century. But it was only for a brief period that he toured as a concert artist associated with Filippo Manfredi (pupil of Tartini). His successes in Paris in 1788-69 led to his appointment at the Spanish Court where his true patron was the Infante Don Luis. (The Prince of Asturias was himself as a violinist so vain of the interest that ought to belong at all times to the first violin part that he once threw the wretched composer the length of the room as a milder alternative to pitching him out of the window!) He served in Spain until 1785. For some years thereafter he held an appointment at the court of Frederick William II of Prussia (the royal 'cellist for whom Mozart composed his last three quartets), then returned to Spain where after a few years he found a patron in Lucien Bonaparte. He died in penury at Madrid.

Boccherini was a prolific and perhaps a prodigal composer. He produced about four-hundred works of one sort and another, for the most part chamber music. In truth, despite his neat and lively style and his exploitation of the developing techniques of string instruments, he wrote too much. But this is not to suppose that we do him justice by narrowing our attention to one early famous minuet ('all the rage' in the 1920's) and one adroit and engaging violoncello concerto. (There appear to be three if not four others). His ensemble chamber music comprises 113 quintets with two 'celli, 12 quintets with two violas dating from 1802 and said to be more balanced and mature than the double-cello quintets, 12 quintets for pianoforte and strings dating from 1797 and 1799 which are regarded as his finest works, and for string quartet some ninety works. His other chamber music comprises sonatas, trios, and quintets with wind instruments; there are also a number of symphonies and concertos and concertantes, one opera and four works to sacred texts including a fine 'Stabat Mater' (1800).

There is as yet no published thematic catalogue of Boccherini's works though more than one scholar has worked towards the attempt to produce an ordered account of this voluminous mass of music. As was common at this period the same sets of works may appear under different opus numbers according to the various publishers responsible. In 1788 Janet & Cottle published a collected edition of 95 double-cello quintets; and it is from these parts that the present performance of No. 70 in that series is given.

Boccherini began composing for this novel type of ensemble in 1771. It has been suggested that it may have been the appearance on tour of the virtuosi brothers Duport in Madrid that inspired the idea, though Boccherini would have had sufficient reason in his own preoccupation as a virtuoso 'cellist. He adopts various methods of handling his additional (i.e. first) 'cello. There are felicitous tenor melodies in the high register, and sometimes passages of concertante involving the whole depth of range; and it is true that readiness to focus even briefly upon the 'cello for thematic interest leads to a distribution of interest amongst viola and second violin. But in truth Boccherini is often quite content to treat 'cello I like a somewhat mundane extra viola, or to double it in octaves with 'cello II in the

bass—very effectively in some thematic passages, but often only a piece of casual opportunism.

In 1955 we presented at these concerts an example of Boccherini in an unusually serious vein, the G minor Quintet Op. 37 No. 2. This present example is more typical of his general outlook—optimistic, generally neat and fastidious in style, owing as much as any man of his day to polite mannerisms, but ready to surprise as opportunity allows, and, as did Haydn, finding the Minuet and Trio a challenge for adventure.

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 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. QUINTET IN C MAJOR (Op. 163)

Schubert
(1797-1828)

Allegro ma non troppo

Adagio

Scherzo : Presto—Trio : Andante sostenuto

Allegretto

It is difficult to restrain emotion in speaking or writing upon this wonderful quintet, Schubert's supreme instrumental work. Not many months before he died Schubert heard a performance of the Beethoven C sharp minor Quartet (Op. 131), which moved him so deeply that he was quite beside himself. That same autumn he composed this great work (and his last three great pianoforte sonatas)—yet he never heard it played, and indeed it was first performed only about 22 years after his death and published a few years later still. It was this quintet which inspired Brahms to compose his great sextets and quintets—indeed Brahms' Pianoforte quintet was first conceived for strings only exactly upon this model. Certain comments are obvious—that Schubert favoured the double-cello ensemble employed by Boccherini rather than the Mozartian model with two violas : that a second 'cello means the addition not merely of another bass but of an instrument which is free to be used throughout its whole range, and in particular, in its tenor register. But Boccherini knew nothing of the richness of such an ensemble, nor dreamt for one moment of such visions as are here unfolded. When all is said and done, verbal comments are as clumsy and superfluous here as marginalia are beside the perfection of a poem of Keats. The only commentary lies here and there in some of the finest of Schubert's other music. Thus the slow movement of Schubert's last (B flat) sonata is analagous to, though less profound than, the E major Adagio here—for this moves from perfect tranquillity to the extreme of anguished emotion—a disturbance of spirit analagous to, but yet more searching than, that from which the confident gaiety of the finale marches forth in the Octet. Elsewhere than here one may find a trio section in serious mood contrasting with a scherzo of unfettered happiness, but the Andante sostenuto here is quite unique in its depth of emotion. In rhythm, tempo of thought and, indeed, in spirit itself, we are removed on the instant from the superb triumph of a symphonic scherzo to quite another sphere of human existence.

One feels that the whole of Schubert is enshrined in this work. If there is one thought that will linger long in the mind's ear after the day is done, it may well be that undying melody of the first movement which comes to us in the magic moment when by simply turning upon the heel (or upon a single note) we look upon a new horizon in utter quietude.

S. T. M. N.