

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1963-64

Sixth Concert

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER
JULIAN CUMMINGS

BRIAN HAWKINS
IAN HAMPTON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 23rd JANUARY, 1964
AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

PROGRAMME

1. QUARTET IN F MAJOR (AFTER OP. 14 NO. 1)

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro moderato
Allegretto
Allegro (Rondo)

The transcription of music from one medium to another seldom admits of literal reproduction if an aesthetic effect comparable to that of the original is to be achieved. An element of re-composition is involved, and becomes the more imperative as the new medium imposes its equivalent but dissimilar and distinctive stylistic traits, potentialities of texture and dynamics, and special mode of expression. The transference from an originally conceived pianoforte work to string quartet or to orchestra presents a challenge which far transcends the initial valid but nevertheless naive reflection that it often suggests a quartet or an orchestra: and from the reverse position it must be the common experience of those who have been fortunate enough to get to know their classical orchestral literature at first hand from their own participation in pianoforte-duet transcriptions (without undue reliance upon gramophone records) that the pianoforte for so much of the time sounds very far from being its natural self, however sympathetic and expert their art.

In a letter of 1802 to Breitkopf and Härtel Beethoven mentions his having transformed one of his pianoforte sonatas into a String Quartet, to comply with an urgent request, observing that he was "sure that nobody else could easily have done it." For, as he says (after humbly paying just tribute to Mozart and Haydn), not only must whole passages be effaced or altered, but one has to add new passages—in short the same powers of invention are called for as were involved in the original composing.

This transformation of the Pianoforte Sonata in E major Op. 14 No. 1 into a Quartet in F presents such a fascinating object lesson in what is involved (between the respective limits of trivial adjustments and of virtual re-composition) that one is indeed grateful for the publication of the two works in parallel in the Eulenburg miniature score under the editorship of Professor Altmann (first published 1910—for the work was not included in the complete edition of Beethoven's works). The transportation up a semi-tone into F is of course a trivial matter occasioned purely by the need to bring the low dominant note into the range of 'cello and viola. The measure of transformation involved in passage after passage will be immediately apparent to any listener familiar with the original, but he will do Beethoven and the work the more justice if he is prepared to listen to the result on its own merits, prepared for the while to accept it as existing in its own rights, and after the event he may the more rewardingly satisfy his curiosity about what he found to be unfamiliar or frankly surprising by turning to the copy. The listener who is not haunted by any memory of the pianoforte sonata may ignore all of this preamble in coming to know a somewhat unusual work that lies engagingly on the fringe but not within the canon of the Beethoven Quartets.

S.T.M.N.

2. STRING QUARTET NO. 2

Kenneth Leighton
(b. 1929)

Molto Adagio—Allegro—Presto
Marcia Lenta
Allegro Energico
Epilogo; Lento

This work was completed in 1957 and first performed by the New Edinburgh Quartet in the same year. In 1959 it was chosen as one of the works representing this country at the International Music Council (U.N.E.S.C.O.) in Paris, and has since been performed in the U.S.A. and Japan.

The opening Adagio presents what might be called the motto-theme, a wedge-shaped tune which moves chromatically outwards, and is characterized by the semi-tone and whole-tone relationship. The rest of the material in both Allegro and Presto sections derives from this opening, except for a syncopated scale-figure which first appears in the Presto. At the climax of the movement the theme of the Adagio is brought back by the 'cello in counterpoint against the lively material of the Presto.

Viola and 'cello begin the Slow March with a tune in dotted rhythm, but the second subject (of a more lyrical and sustained character) is soon heard on the first violin, poised above the march-tune. A mysterious transition leads to an extended working-out of the second subject, *sempre alla marcia*.

The third movement is in the manner of an energetic Scherzo which gives little respite to either players or audience. There are two distinct themes. The first uses the mixture of major and minor thirds: the second (heard first on the viola) derives its character from repeated notes and unequal rhythms. 5/8 here becomes the basic pattern. The development of these two tunes is mainly contrapuntal, but a contrasting middle section allows the first violin to soar with a more lyrical version of subject II. The two tunes then unite to form a single fugue-subject, and from here to the end there is little time to breathe.

The Epilogue is played pianissimo almost throughout, and its first chromatic theme has an obviously close relationship to the motto-theme. The second tune, on the other hand, aims to be as simple as possible and completely diatonic. Towards the end of the movement the two ideas come together: the chromatic theme fades into accompaniment, enclosed by the diatonic tune above and below. But it is clear which of them triumphs in the end.

K.L.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET IN G MAJOR. OP. 106

Dvorák
(1841-1904)

Allegro moderato

Adagio ma non troppo

Molto vivace

Andante sostenuto, leading to Allegro con fuoco

This work was written towards the end of 1895, shortly after Dvorák's return from New York, where he had lived for three years as director of the National Conservatoire of Music. Just as the background of that period is reflected in such works of his as the New World Symphony or the String Quartet in F major, the Quartet in G, his last one, seems to express the composer's happiness at being home again in his beloved country of woods and meadows. That lovely landscape may easily be found in the idyllic opening movement, most of all in its shapely second subject, which, resumed again in the Finale, suggests the idiom of Czech folksong. The same holds of other inspired inventions in this work, to the beautiful Adagio melody as well as to the irresistible dance rhythm of the scherzo and the exhilarating polka strains of the finale.

With all his mellow maturity of style, there is an occasional sketchiness in Dvorák's enormously rich output, as an inevitable result of his habits of creating: this quartet was written within less than a week. The freshness and directness of invention, however, and Dvorák's extraordinary brilliance of quartet writing are qualities which have always made it equally enjoyable for performers and for listeners and with which it has kept a distinguished place in the repertory.

H.G.