

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

SEASON 1964-65

Third Concert

REID ORCHESTRA

Leader: DR. JOHN FAIRBAIRN

Guest Conductor: KENNETH LEIGHTON

Solo Pianoforte:

PETER WALLFISCH

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 19th NOVEMBER, 1964

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

PROGRAMME

1. OVERTURE: "L'ITALIANA IN ALGERI" *Rossini*
(1792-1868)
2. CONCERTO FOR STRING ORCHESTRA *Kenneth Leighton*
(b. 1929)
Lento Sostenuto
Molto Ritmico
Adagio Maestoso—Allegro

Completed in 1961, this work was written for Harvey Phillips, and first performed in London by the Harvey Phillips String Orchestra in the same year.

It sets out to obtain full resonance from the medium, not by dividing the orchestra into two, but by large scale use of Divisi, which couples together not only various sections of violins, but also at times violins and second violas, or first cellos and violins, etc.

The first movement is elegiac, and moves from a restrained fugal opening to a high-pitched climax of feeling. The thematic material is contained in the viola theme heard at the outset.

The second movement is a Scherzo for strings pizzicati, again fugal, and monothematic in structure.

The finale is the most extended movement, starting like a French Overture, and launching into a strenuous Allegro. In the final section the time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/8, and the violas sing out in a positive manner against the subdued figuration of the Allegro. Their song gradually spreads over the whole orchestra and leads to a diatonicised transformation of the "French Overture" theme.

3. PIANOFORTE CONCERTO NO. 3 *Bartók*
(1881-1945)
Allegretto
Adagio Religioso
Allegro Vivace

This is the last work that Bartók all but finished before his death in 1945. Only the last seventeen bars were left incomplete in a kind of musical shorthand, and orchestrated by his friend Tibor Serly.

Much has been said and written about the mellowing of style in Bartók's last works. It has been attributed to pressure from friends who wished him to make himself intelligible to a wider audience, or more often to the fatigue and ill health which afflicted him during the last tragic years of his life. Neither of these explanations seems faintly reasonable in view of the composer's

supreme integrity as an artist. It seems much more likely that through suffering and premature old age the composer arrived at a serenity of spirit which sacrificed none of the passionate ideals of his youth, though it may have approached music-making from a more relaxed and even detached point of view.

The first movement shows this in its light-weight character, its restrained orchestration and consistently lyrical style. Like most of Bartók's first movements it is in Sonata form.

The slow movement, with its chorale and interlude of "night-music" is one of the finest achievements of Bartók's whole career, and demonstrates that devotional feeling to which he was invariably inspired by the prospect of nature. It has a close resemblance to the late Beethoven quartets (particularly the slow movement of Opus 132) with its mixture of profound sadness and tranquillity.

The finale is a rondo with two fugal episodes and an extended Presto coda.

INTERVAL

4. CONCERTO FOR STRING ORCHESTRA (repeated) *Kenneth Leighton*
5. NOBILISSIMA VISIONE—Orchestral Suite *Hindemith*
(1895-1963)
Introduction and Rondo
March and Pastorale
Passacaglia

The idiom of Hindemith grew softer in his middle years (his best period is from roughly 1929 to 1950) but not weaker, as some misguided critics have tried to show.

Nobilissima Visione (completed in 1938) originated in the first place in a commission from Diaghilev, who in 1929 asked Hindemith to write a ballet on a mystical subject. The project was interrupted by the death of Diaghilev, and it was not until 1937 that the composer returned to the idea, in collaboration now with the great dancer and choreographer Massine. The subject chosen was the life of St. Francis, and the ballet was first performed by the Ballet Russe in 1938, with tremendous success. The war however cut short the career of the ballet, and it has unfortunately not been revived.

In 1939 Hindemith took five extracts from the ballet to form a three-movement suite.

1. Introduction and Rondo.

While composing, Hindemith made a special study of Medieval music, and the beautiful melody of the slow

introduction is based on the Troubadour song "Ce fut en Mai". The music portrays St. Francis at prayer, after having left behind him his worldly possessions and ancestral home.

The Rondo represents the "mystic union of the Saint with Mistress Poverty", the scene being inspired by the old Tuscan legend. During the movement there is a procession of Franciscan monks, and the flow of the music is punctuated at regular intervals by a beautiful cadence figure. The shape of the movement as a whole is extremely interesting, for it is not a Rondo in the traditional sense. Though quite short it pours out its themes in amazing profusion for a modern composer, and the element of Rondo lies in the return of the cadence-figure, which persists just as the refrain does in a Medieval chanson.

2. March and Pastorale.

The March depicts a troop of soldiers and is delightfully scored. Again we have a movement brim full of ideas, which culminate in a powerful tutti, bursting immediately into a vigorous fugato. The fugal section suggests "the brutality with which the soldiers set upon the travelling burgher and rob him". The March then returns, now brash and vulgar, but the recapitulation is shortened, and the music dies away quite suddenly as the soldiers leave the scene.

The Pastorale (a very moving piece for strings with flute taking two of the phrases) depicts the appearance of the three women—Chastity, Submissiveness and Poverty.

Finally the tempo changes to a naive but strangely affecting 6/8 dance rhythm, and the oboe gives us yet another melody, deceptively simple, though very characteristic of its composer.

3. Passacaglia.

This is inspired by St. Francis's famous Hymn to the Sun. There are other fine Passacaglias in Hindemith's works, but none is more noble or majestic. The theme (with its exultant fourths) though perfectly balanced and in the shape of an arch, is strikingly subtle and even ambiguous in its rhythmic structure.

There are nineteen variations, and the piece is in the old tradition of the Passacaglia proper. The theme is not transposed, but remains firmly planted in G, in spite of the contradictions that occur from time to time. The shape of it is kept intact except for the final variation, where it breaks out into a triplet figure. It is thoroughly audible, and in the forefront of events all the time.

K. L.