

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1965-66

Eighth Concert

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER
AUSTIN PATTERSON

PHILIP CLARK
DAVID EDWARDS

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC
THURSDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY, 1966
AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

PROGRAMME

I. QUARTET IN B FLAT, OP. 18, NO. 6

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro con brio
Adagio ma non troppo
Scherzo
Adagio ("La Malinconia") leading to Allegro

In general Beethoven's first set of six quartets (Op. 18) show an optimistic outlook—only one (No. 4) is based on a minor key—and none is more virile in its optimism than this sixth quartet in B flat, and nowhere more virile than in the alert syncopation of its scherzo. Virtually a new concept in the language of classical Viennese composers, a movement playing not only with the basic proposition that six notes in a measure can be framed as twice three, or thrice two, but that if you throw the accent across both of these you can arrive at a stimulating physical logic that defies theory. But optimism prevails from the outset of the opening Allegro—the wellbeing of Haydn but with a difference (young men of worth are not simply the result of identifiable influences!) and the measure of imagination and inventiveness is fully apparent in the second theme with its major-minor and extended entourage of modality. The Adagio follows a simple ternary design, but being from the outset sensitively decorative in its style achieves wonders of subtle grace as its two themes are enhanced in their repetitions.

After the Scherzo (with its contrasting virtuoso trio—of accompanied violino primo) the Adagio entitled 'La Malinconia' would seem to explode the prevailing optimism, but it proves to be rather a foil to what ensues than the black brooding of disillusionment that Durer depicts; it is in fact a mood of sober and barely sombre reflection, and as such it convincingly returns for brief moments towards the end of a finale which is a spry, gay rondo in theme and character and which, whilst the analyst might say it obeys only the minimum requirements of a truncated sonata form has an ample sleeveful of coda out of which to shape a whole coda of rondoid felicity.

S.T.M.N.

2. STRING QUARTET NO. 2, OP. 17

Bela Bartok
(1881-1945)

Moderato
Allegro molto capriccioso
Lento

Bartok's second String Quartet—completed in 1917 when he was thirty-six and first performed in Budapest in the following year by the Quartet Waldbauer-Kerpely to whom it is dedicated—marks an important turning-point in his creative development. For it belongs to the very first works in which the fingerprints of Bartok's mature style become visible. An increasingly complex idiom of chromatic harmony is here (perhaps for the first time) applied to primitive melodic material of Hungarian peasant

origin. Bartok's later obsession with tiny motif-particles rather than with elongated melodic paragraphs, but also his life-long aim at closest thematic integration can be noticed in the two slow flanking movements in which identical thematic cells are utilised.

The principal melody of the first movement, given to the first Violin and extending over bars 2 to 6 is a case in point. It presents, surely quite fortuitously, an almost complete twelve-note series (e-a-d-c sharp-g sharp-g natural-b flat-g double sharp-f sharp-f natural-e flat-d flat) but only its incipit of five notes, with the intervals of rising and falling Fourths, is turned into a determinant of the whole work. That five note incipit, which pervades the predominantly lyrical first movement as a kind of haunting bird-cry, returns later on to express the introspective gloom of the third movement (g sharp-c sharp-f-c-b flat, in bars 11 and 12). Quartet No. 2 is planned, like its predecessor Op. 8, in three movements of which only the initial one approximately conforms to the traditional pattern of Sonata-form. In it the cantabile subject (cue f) is only a subtle transformation of the initial five-note-motif and the effect of thematic contrast is shifted to the conclusion group, a three-note-motif and its inversion which, on the occasion of its recapitulatory return near the end of the movement, is presented as a product of bitonality. The melody in the upper strings, with its rising and falling Fourth and its quaint folk-tune-like flavour, progresses in A minor and D minor while its chordal pizzicato-accompaniment in the Cello sticks to A major and D major with gentle persistence.

As the first movement favoured the interval of the rising and falling Fourth, the second movement, a kind of primitive and ferocious Rondo, propelled by the irresistible momentum of its staccato rhythm (an unmistakable feature of Hungarian folk-dance!) seems chiefly determined by the Tritone and the minor Third. Their constant reiteration produces motif-patterns, and a kind of crude background harmony is being provided by a system of pedal-points (mainly utilising open strings). The savagery of this perpetuum mobile-like Scherzo reaches its climax in the final Stretto, relying entirely on a frenzied repetition of the three-note-motif, f sharp-f natural-d.

The reflective gloom of the final "Lento" comes as a shattering anti-climax. It functions as a psychological "flash-back" to the two preceding movements. However, the five-note "bird-cry" motif of movement 1 as well as the Tritone of the Scherzo now reappear in the weird elongation of a "slow-motion" picture. The falling Fourth again begins to dominate the music which, particularly in the *accelerando* of its final climax, seems to express the approach of some fatal and irrevocable event. The final ten bars, as it were, epitomize the fundamental tension of the whole work in its basic intervallic form. They present a succession of expressionless, disjointed major Thirds and Fourths, with the three-note-motif of the middle movement wistfully trailing off in the last utterance of the first Violin.

H. F. R.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET IN G MAJOR, OP. 161

Schubert
(1797-1828)

Allegro molto moderato
Andante un poco moto
Scherzo: Allegro vivace—Allegretto
Allegro assai

This great quartet, composed between June 20th and 30th, 1826, did not appear in print until twenty-two years after Schubert's death, when it was published as Op. 161, to be followed two years later by the last and greatest of Schubert's chamber music compositions, the Quintet in C major with two 'cellos (Op. 163). Both works have much in common and much that distinguishes them from Schubert's earlier chamber music for strings. At the outset each shows the harmonic basis of Schubert's thought which is to result in many orchestral effects. Each, too, is remarkable for the fullness of the writing; the first movement of the earlier work indeed seems prophetic of the addition of other instruments to the quartet ensemble, for there are several passages which consist of true sextet writing such as will be found in Brahms, to which the four instruments are required to adapt their powers.

The G major quartet is of truly astonishing size, for Schubert claims space at each stage for the repetition, variation, and immediate "local" development of his themes.

The basic idea of the work as a whole is that proclaimed in the opening themes of the first and last movements, the conflict and synthesis of major and minor tonality. In the first movement, this opposition is reinforced by the dynamic contrasts of pianissimo and fortissimo with which the major-minor issue is largely equated. Again the major influence is lyrical, that of the minor inclines to impetuous gestures and energetic action.

The Andante (in E minor) is written in extended Lied form, the "song" and the "after-song" (here a dramatic episode of symphonic power) alternating in a scheme of five stanzas. The song melody of the 'cello itself foreshadows the alternating pattern of the whole movement.

The B minor Scherzo with its "all-over" rhythmic pattern defies description. To quote the thematic rhythm of the first two bars would explain the whole. To call this a "chattering" rhythm because it begins pianissimo would be to ignore the relentless force with which it soon hammers out its invincible will. But the Trio invites to less strenuous ways with the enchanting sway of its amiable Landler valse.

The Rondo finale is as much a feat of endurance as a Kentucky running set, and its ample repetitions should be judged by their cumulative effect in protracting the excitement. If not a markedly subtle rondo, it is nevertheless an intoxicating dance.

S.T.M.N.