

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS
SEASON 1966-67

FIRST CONCERT

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER
AUSTIN PATTERSON

PHILIP CLARK
DAVID EDWARDS

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 13th OCTOBER, 1966

AT 7.30 p.m.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

PROGRAMME

2. QUARTET No. 5

Bartók
(1881-1945)

Allegro
Adagio molto
Scherzo—alla bulgarese
Andante
Finale

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 easeful 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.

The adjective most frequently applied to the 5th Quartet has been 'masterly.' Written after a three-year period of indecision and inner conflict, (1934) it contains neither the unbearable tension of No. 4 nor the anguish of No. 6. Its quality is more relaxed, and its poise, precision and formal beauty make it for many connoisseurs of Bartók's music an unending source of delight and satisfaction. It is a work of absolute maturity; a work in which the familiar characteristics of Bartók's style attain a new level of superhuman purity and perfect control; and this without for a moment sacrificing an extraordinary spontaneity of expression.

Bartók's music as a whole constitutes a powerful re-affirmation of the fundamental nature of tonality, even though it be a tonality viewed from the broader (and for us more intensely real) viewpoint of a great twentieth century composer. Although in its symmetrical five-movement plan this quartet resembles its predecessor, the basic tonality of B flat is here more easily perceived, as well as the close inner relationship between movements.

The first movement is as rich in material as any classical movement. The first subject with its repeated B flats and important augmented fourth relationship reappears in the form of a fugue in the Finale, and is the key to the harmonic and melodic design of the work as a whole. The first group also contains two subsidiary themes — a short playful motif with trills, and a more violent leaping figure containing Bartók's characteristic tension between whole-tone and semitone. Contrast within unity (one of the fundamentals of symphonic style) is clearly demonstrated by the second subject — a tender lyrical theme in running triplets over a pizzicato bass, which uses, however, the same intervallic relationships as the first subject. A closely argued development section makes use mainly of the first group, and the tension grows with the emphasis on the semitonal clash. The recapitulation works backwards, and with beautifully calculated effect inverts the shape of each subject in turn.

Just as first and last movements correspond, so the second and fourth movements (different as they are in mood) form a symmetry. After a short and elusive introduction (trills and augmented fourths) a solemn chorale is heard on the lower strings, while the first violin maintains the chromatic tension. The middle section is related to the "night" music of the fourth quartet and other works. An intensely lyrical theme rises gradually out of a delicate and mysterious background of tremolandi and pizzicato glissandos.

The Scherzo uses the Bulgarian rhythms of which Bartók is so fond in his later works. Here the grouping is 4+2+3, but while such unequal groupings usually produce tension, the mood here is comparatively placid, at least at the outset. In the Trio the viola plays a simple folksong-like tune against the chromatics of an ostinato accompaniment on the violin. The perfection of this "balanced" tension makes this one of the most enchanting moments of the work.

The Andante begins in the same fragmentary way as the second movement, and again a melodic line of great beauty emerges from an atmospheric background; but here it is the second section (tremolando chords) which corresponds to the chorale of the second movement. A more extended line is then heard in canon between violin and cello, and culminates in an impassioned rising minor third. The recapitulation is very short and is a subtle combination of the various elements of the movement.

In the extended and brilliant finale even more use is made of close canon and strict inversion. After a brief introduction the theme is stated on violins and immediately treated canonically. Both the canonic extension and the theme itself are repeated in inversion. The recapitulation of the introductory bars heralds in a short episode leading in turn to a longer section (*Piu presto*) with an apparently new theme announced in imitation by the two violins. By an extraordinarily pure and imaginative use of canonic device Bartók expands this into a fine paragraph culminating in a second recapitulation of the introductory bars, and in a fugue on a transformation of the first movement theme. A short "capriccioso" episode leads to the final recapitulation of the rondo subject, now using both original and inversion together. Before the final climax however, there is yet another interruption – a short *Allegretto con indifferenza* – in which the theme appears in A major and with the simplest possible harmony. An irresistible bitonal twist serves to remind us of the humanity as well as of the unbounded energy of this music.

K.L.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET IN F MAJOR (K. 590)

Allegro moderato

Andante

Menuetto: Allegretto

Allegro

Mozart
(1756–1791)

Mozart's last three quartets were the outcome of his visit to Berlin in the spring of 1789. In June of that same year he composed the first (K. 575–D major) of an intended set of six quartets for dedication to Frederick William II of Prussia, who was himself a keen violoncellist. In the summer of 1790, he completed two further quartets – the B flat (K. 589) and this present quartet. Having regard to the King's special interest, Mozart gives a far greater prominence to 'cello, particularly in melodic passages, than in his previous quartets. But this enfranchisement of the 'cello inevitably involves a more generous distribution of interest amongst all four instruments, and the viola certainly gains as much as the 'cello from this reorientation. In the first of these quartets, Mozart seems to have made use of material sketched many years earlier, but in this last quartet the ideas, the style and the design are integrated in one inventive process. It is not only the sudden brusque gesture or recoiling emotions of the opening which prompt thoughts of Beethoven. Time and again the spaciousness of phrase and of paragraph invite such a comparison, as also do the speedy impetus and sustained humour of the monothematic and contrapuntal finale. We are in a terrain of musical thought very different from any of that covered in the six 'Haydn' quartets. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Andante (or 'Allegretto' if we accept the revised tempo direction of the first edition). On paper this may appear a disarmingly simple conception, but its basic simplicity is the guarantee of its ample room for sustained growth and at the same time for a great depth of feeling and of nuance in the generous handling of its phrases. The whole is so much greater than the sum of all its movements.

S.T.M.N.