

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS
SEASON 1966-67

FOURTH CONCERT

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER

PHILIP CLARK

AUSTIN PATTERSON

DAVID EDWARDS

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 24th NOVEMBER, 1966

AT 7.30 p.m.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

1. QUARTET IN F MAJOR, OP. 18, NO. 1

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro con brio
Adagio (affettuoso ed appassionato)
Scherzo (allegro molto)
Finale - Allegro

The difficulties that Beethoven experienced in his first attempts at writing for a string quartet may have been exaggerated, but it is clear that his interest lay for a time in the trio rather than in the quartet, and in the four fine trios of Op. 3 and Op. 9 not to mention the Serenade Op. 8 and the Flute Serenade, there is nothing in the sureness of his treatment to suggest that he addressed himself to any other genre, but only cause for regret that he wrote no more such trios in his later life. Nevertheless we have Beethoven's own word for it that in the composition of his six Op. 18 quartets he did not at once and without difficulty attain his aim.

They were published in two sets in 1801, the order of arrangement being different from that of their composition; for the third (in D) was completed first and there is reason to suppose that the fourth (in C minor) was the last. A version of this F major quartet written in 1799 differed in some respects from that published later. Beethoven sent a copy to his friend Amenda, but wrote a year later: "Do not pass on to others the quartet as you have it. I have altered it considerably, having but just learned to compose quartets aright, as you will see when I send it to you." A comparison of the two versions is said to reveal "a freer, more soloistic treatment of the accompanying parts and a clearer individualisation of the violoncello part" in the revised version.

The first movement maintains almost throughout the characteristic rhythmical figure of a "turn" quietly proclaimed in the opening bars. It is a notable early example of the interest which Beethoven had in building great paragraphs of an "all-over pattern" of material. The quiet lapping figure of the second subject which passes through each instrument is but a short episode in the design.

Of the wonderful Adagio in D minor, we possess some "inside information" in the story related by Amenda to Wiedemann. "When Beethoven had finished his well-known quartet in F major he played the glorious *Adagio* to his friend and asked him what it suggested to him. 'It suggested a lover's parting' said Amenda. 'Well,' replied Beethoven, 'the tomb scene from *Romeo and Juliet* was in my mind.'" Suffice it to say that the movement is in sonata form and to note the wonderful effect produced by the two inside strings playing the melody in unison (in the development)

whilst the first violin utters shrieks of horrified dismay, unassuaged throughout the recapitulation except while the second subject tenderly changes the dark minor colours with a ray of pitiful hope through one of those paradoxical accidents which attend genius but not good fortune.

The Scherzo moves rapidly with irregular phrasing and a changefulness that includes the softest echoes and the busiest of boiling trills. In the trio rapid violin scales string out upon the wind above firmly planted chords.

The Finale is a Rondo with so broad and serious a development that one is left with the impression of a first movement form of almost symphonic scale. The nimble first subject, and the second with its distinctive repeated notes are continued contrapuntally in the lengthy development, whose design of alternation makes much of the codetta subject which has some affinity with the "feminine" theme of the *Eroica*, or even more with a passage in the metronomic Allegretto of the Symphony No. 8.

S.T.M.N.

2. STRING QUARTET IN G MINOR, OP. 10

Debussy
(1862-1918)

Animé et très décidé
Assez vif et bien rythmé
Andantino doucement expressif
Très modéré - Très mouvementé et avec passion

This quartet, numbered I by the composer but the only one he wrote, was composed in 1893, four years after César Franck's great quartet in cyclic form, and ten years before Ravel's quartet. Debussy wrote no other chamber music until the last years of his life when he produced the three sonatas in a consciously new style. The quartet is contemporary with the famous "Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune", which marks the first full flowering of impressionism in Debussy's art.

Debussy was not within the entourage of Franck's pupils and disciples, and indeed many of the Russian nationalists such as Borodin were more congenial to his artistic outlook than were any contemporary French composers. Nevertheless, Franck's conception of cyclic form had a marked influence upon the structure of this quartet which in turn so clearly influenced Ravel. Debussy's second movement (the 'scherzo', though not so named) is pervaded by an ostinato motif (lyrically expanded to form the contrasting section) which is a compact variation of the decisive main theme of the first movement, and in both forms this material plays a very prominent part in the finale. Only the exquisitely beautiful slow movement (Andantino) in D flat major lies altogether outside this associative thematic territory; but if I have

emphasised the origin of Debussy's thematic and formal structure, it should be added that the style and the harmonic language are essentially personal to Debussy, and the work justly ranks as one of the most original and historically most important works in the chamber music of the last seventy years.

S.T.M.N.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET IN C MINOR, OP. 51, NO. 1

Brahms
(1833-1897)

Allegro
Romanze (Poco adagio)
Allegretto molto moderato
Finale (Allegro)

The C minor String Quartet, the first of the three which Brahms permitted to see the light of day, appeared together with the second in 1873, when Brahms was forty. But these were very far from being his first essays in this genre. As a young composer he apparently had great difficulty in reducing his massive harmony and the complexity of his polyphony to the economy of a string quartet, for he himself remarked "It is not hard to compose, but what is fabulously hard is to leave the superfluous notes under the table." It is relevant to observe that the earlier works for strings alone with which he was satisfied were both string sextets.

The opening Allegro of this quartet is a dark and stormy movement, surging in a moment from a quiet beginning to an utterance of tremendous force, only to be brought next moment to its knees to find more eloquent expression of its tragedy in quietness and grief. The emotional tension however at length relaxes leaving the florid quavers of the first violin line lightly festooned about the quiet harmonies. The development section opens quietly, but it is not long before the passionate theme has arisen to march and countermarch in wrathful utterance with that agitated figure of grief standing ever near at hand. The ease of C major, at length permitted by the Fates of Form, cannot however be maintained, and once overclouded the pulse of agitation quickens again till spent emotion falls at last into repose.

The Romanze is a broad movement in which all the instinctive emotional wealth of A flat major finds its full expression. It follows the simplest plan — A B A — with a coda. In the middle section Brahms makes music sigh in such a way as has never been heard before. The listener should be careful that this figure, preserved from the cadence of what went before, does not altogether sigh away the pulse of the beat which falls upon the moments of silence. The main theme is varied upon its return with gorgeous effect.

The F minor Allegretto which follows belongs to a type of intermezzo which Brahms made essentially his own. The lightness and ease of Allegretto is sobered by the qualifications "molto moderato e comodo." Emotionally it is poised upon the edge of complaint, and the utterance is that of some restless and querulous child. Throughout the movement the viola plays a prominent rôle. The trio section dances in a simple open-hearted way in the major mode to the accompaniment of droned notes and pizzicato chords.

The loose thematic relationship of the first two movements is enforced in the first wrathful utterance of the finale, which is compounded of the essence of both. But the movement has a forceful energy and at times a contrapuntal complexity of its own, softened by the swinging syncopation of its secondary theme as also by the tranquil enlargement of the theme itself. Again, the Fates of Form allow the ease of C major to be attained in the recapitulation, and here the measure of their allowance is generous indeed. But at the last the minor mode reappears bringing a prodigious climax of unabated fury.

S.T.M.N.