UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1967-68

Ninth Concert

Pianoforte

COLIN KINGSLEY

EDWARD HARPER

Percussion

GRAHAM MELVILLE-MASON

ANDREW SHIVAS

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

WEDNESDAY, 6TH MARCH, 1968

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

PROGRAMME

1. VISIONS DE L'AMEN for two pianos — *Olivier Messiaen* b. 1908

I Amen de la Création
II Amen des étoiles, de la planete a l'anneau
III Amen de l'Agonie de Jésus
IV Amen du Désir
V Amen des Anges, des Saints, du chant des oiseaux
VI Amen du Jugement
VII Amen de la Consommation

The first performance of this work was given in Paris in 1943, by the composer and Mme. Yvonne Loriod-Messiaen, to whom it is dedicated. The published copy contains notes by Olivier Messiaen concerning the work, and although translation can only approximate to his precise shades of meaning, the following may convey some of his directness of approach to the religious faith to which his music is directly attuned.

C.K.

"Amen" takes on four different meanings:
Amen, let it be thus! The act of Creation.
Amen, I offer obedience, I accept. Your will be done.
Amen, so be it, a desire and a longing for mystical union.
Amen, for Eternity all is decreed, all is brought to its fulness in paradise.

I Amen of Creation
Amen, let it be thus! "God said: Let there be light—and there was light" (*Genesis*)
The first piano plays a double rhythmic pedal throughout, in the manner of a carillon. The second piano gives out the theme of Creation, the principal theme of the whole work, in deep chords; the entire piece is a crescendo.

II Amen of the stars, of the ringed planet
Unceasing and violent pulsing and turning of stars, suns and Saturn, the planet with the coloured rings. "God calls them and they answer: Amen, we are here" (*Baruch*).

III Amen of Christ's Agony
Jesus in His suffering cries "Father, if this chalice cannot pass from me unless I drink of it, Your will be done, not Mine" (*St. Matthew*).

In the music, three motives: (1) the anger of God at the the sins of the world: (2) a cry: (3) a lament based upon four notes, in opposed rhythms. Then, a memory of the theme of Creation. A mighty silence is broken by chords which evoke the unspeakable sufferings of this moment.

IV Amen of longing
Two themes: the first is slow, ecstatic, already telling of the calm of Paradise. The second, at the limits of passion; the soul is drawn towards the blessed state through the vehement desires of mystical love.

V Amen of the Angels, of the Saints, of the songs of birds
First, the song of Angels and Saints, calm, removed from earthly passions. Then the brilliant writing for the first piano turns towards actual songs of birds: nightingales, blackbirds, chaffinches, warblers. The first melody is taken up again, against a rhythmic canon. A short Coda brings back the bird songs.

VI Amen of the Judgement
Three notes, notes like ice. In truth I say to you, Amen. "Accursed, depart from me" (*St. Matthew*).

VII Amen of the Consummation
Paradise, the life of the resurrected, in a carillon of light. The second piano takes again the theme of Creation, drawing from it a long chorale of glory. The first piano surrounds the notes of the second with a continuous carillon of chords, shining rhythms and canons, like the precious stones of the Apocalypse dancing, ringing and clashing in their transformation.

INTERVAL

2. SONATA FOR TWO PIANOS AND PERCUSSION

Bartok
(1881-1945)

Assai lento—Allegro molto
Lento, ma non troppo
Allegro non troppo

This Sonata, written in 1937, dates from one of Bartok's most mature and fruitful periods; it comes between the fifth quartet (1934) and the sixth (1939), and is a year later than the magnificent 'Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta' with which it has many features in common. It is now normal to include extensive percussion parts in chamber works, but this is one of the first works to take the percussion department out of the orchestra and into the realm of chamber music. The resources used look modest by present day standards (3 pedal tympani, xylophone, side-drums—with and without snares—cymbals—suspended and struck—bass-drum, triangle and tam-tam) but are handled with an imagination that never fails to excite the listener; for instance, the awesome tam-tam in the slow introduction, the sinister 'glissandi' on the pedal tympani, the xylophone, brilliant in the first 'allegro', impudently tongue-in-cheek in the 'finale'. Always the effects are governed by purely musical impulses; the percussion both contrasts with and adds colour to the piano parts. (The later version for Two Pianos and Orchestra is far less effective and emphasises how perfectly the work is conceived for its medium).

The first movement is a huge sonata-movement preceded by an extended, darkly-coloured slow introduction. This is most remarkable in the way that it builds up the tension with a very long 'accelerando' which finally establishes the speed of the 'allegro'. Here, apart from a few quiet moments with the gentle, scalic second subject, the mood is intense and violent, especially in the development section where, over an 'ostinato', the material is fragmented and hurled about with extreme abandonment. The other movements are both examples of styles that one finds throughout Bartok's career. The slow movement is a night-piece, beginning quietly with percussion alone, the pianos entering with simple, yet expressive, folk-like melodies. There is an impassioned middle section before the remote, impressionistic opening returns, though there are hints of violence right through to the end. A blaze of C major sets the last movement on its way; a lively 'rondo' in which the theme is treated to a remarkable number of subtle transformations before it dies away, a distant but still amiable march.

E. J. H.