

Summer Series 1968

Thursday 18th April 1968 at 7.30 p.m.

Reid School of Music

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

Miles Baster

Philip Clark

Austin Patterson

David Edwards

Programme

1. QUARTET in B flat, K.458 (The Hunt)

Mozart
(1756-1791)

It may be partly owing to its nickname that this quartet has managed to herald its way to the forefront of popular favour amongst those ten of Mozart's twenty-seven quartets which are 'famous' and mature. But since the title holds we may turn it to our own advantage. If there is anything which this music and hunting share in common it is the desire to protract the exquisite business as long as possible. The ingenuity of Mozart in elaborating and prolonging his cadences, and indeed in managing to live some of his adventures over again, is never lacking in resource. Surprisingly before the beginning of the development the hunt springs a new hare - a new easy-going tune - "and that too they left behind" and never gave it another thought. But at the end the greatest fun begins when these four jovial huntsmen fall to hunting one another in close stretto before calling it a day with a formal cadence.

Although a famous remark of Haydn's would suggest that he despaired of ever writing a really original Minuet again, yet the diversity exhibited in the eighty-six minuets of his quartets alone is truly astonishing, and Mozart is no less ingenious in the variety he achieves within the limiting conditions of that movement. Here what impresses one most is the extraordinary continuity of the Minuet and Trio alike, even from the first phrase, ten bars long, with its heavy accents forestalling the beat.

The slow movement is a broad adagio, and what contributes notably to its breadth is the slowly mounting violin arpeggio which sustains the motion across the wide spaces that lie between its phrases. But the truly magic moments come in the relaxed dreaming of the second subject when we feel ourselves drifting down some infinite vista of thought tenderly touched with a subtle chromaticism.

When Mozart first embarked on his finale, he pictured it as a rather conventionally contrapuntal presto in white-note notation (not altogether remote from Fux's Gradus), but in a trice his humour saved him; so starting afresh he gave full rein to the vein of droll humour provided by a twist of cadence. The theme has been said to be related to a folk song, and one of its relatives surely appears in the finale of the Concerto for two pianofortes (K.365). As for the cadence joke (which Mozart makes his instruments repeat over and over again in high good humour), it was repeated by Beethoven in the rondo of his fourth pianoforte concert. (Beethoven of course would have said that he had it straight from his pianoforte's mouth - such is the way of jokes!). But nothing can be more frustrating than a guide to lively humour - and I forbear to say more.

S.T.M.N.

2. QUARTET No. 4

Richard Rodney Bennett
b. 1936Molto vivace - lento espressivo
Allegro - andante - adagio

My String Quartet No. 4 was composed in America in June, 1964 in response/

(over)

/response to a commission from the City Music Society to celebrate their 25th anniversary. It was first performed in the Goldsmiths Hall by the Allegri String Quartet.

The work is in two movements which are laid out in a slightly unusual format. The first movement consists of two alternating groups of material - *molto vivace* and *lento espressivo*. Each time one of these groups returns it is rhythmically identical but the rhythmic patterns are laid out quite differently for the instruments, so that a rhythmic pattern which is played by a solo instrument in the first appearance of the material may be distributed throughout the entire string quartet on a later appearance.

The second movement starts with a scherzo-like *allegro*. This eventually quietens down and passes through a more tranquil *andante* to reach an extremely sustained *adagio* movement which ends the Quartet.

R.R.B.

Bennett was born in Broadstairs, Kent, in 1936 and studied under Lennox Berkeley, Howard Ferguson and Pierre Boulez. His compositions include music for orchestra, films, television and revue, as well as for chamber music ensembles (with and without voices), solo songs and piano music. Perhaps his most widely known work is the opera 'The Mines of Sulphur' which has been toured by Sadlers Wells in Britain and produced in Italy and elsewhere; it has also been given a television performance.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET in A Minor, Op.132

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Assai sostenuto - Allegro

Allegro ma non tanto

Molto Adagio - Andante - Tempo I - Andante - Tempo I

Alla marcia, assai vivace - Piu Allegro

Allegro appassionato - Presto

The last five quartets of Beethoven are a world in themselves - not so much a world apart from the common world of man's experience, aspirations and the stresses of life, but a world of sublimation and transfiguration, and of the reconciliation that a divine vision brings. Whilst each quartet of course stands as a work complete in itself, they nevertheless form a sequence of experience in that the E flat Op.127 forms a portal of heavenly joy, and the F major Op.135 as it were an epilogue, whilst both of these stand a little apart from the three central quartets which are linked by their response to one important challenge and which stand as three different but closely related revelations stemming from one sustained visionary experience. The true order of these three is first the A minor Op.132 completed before September 1825, secondly the B flat Op.130 with the *Grosse Fuge* finale which Beethoven worked upon at the same time and finished (it is believed) in October, and thirdly the C sharp minor Op.131, sketches for which were begun before Op.130 was completed.

That thematic challenge in its starkest utterance forms the theme of the great fugue, that superhuman endeavour to which the ease and radiant beauty of the earlier movements are as it were the foothills of preparation for seeking the heights. Subsequently in the C sharp minor it is transformed into the mystical contemplation of the opening fugue, yet also inspires the turbulent resolution and heavy gravement of the finale.

It is this theme, scrolled about itself in quiet mystic utterance of perfect symmetry, which is the starting point of the A minor; and this four-note motive (direct and inverted) underlies the first troubled and yearning melody of the *Allegro*, constantly informs the harmonic progressions and at times emerges from its inner mystical influence to forthright acclaim. Over against this lies the radiant beauty of the melodic second subject, easefully accompanied, and opening out a liberal expanse of major harmonies. Some commentators have referred to the form of/

/of this movement as consisting of three expositions. That is to try and account for it in terms of normal procedure, leaving anomalously a residue of all forefront and no aftermath. But that unsatisfactory explanation reflects the truth that there are three main phases, the second being a partly developed recapitulation on tonic tonality with a coda that brings an intensified feeling of resolve. The major key brings complete and intimate joy in the second movement - an ever-repeated, treasured turn of phrase, and a trio of ethereal piping to a drone and of dance interrupted only momentarily by a formidable intrusion of the first motto theme.

No one knows whether, or if so how far, Beethoven may have progressed with this quartet before his serious illness of March-April 1825, but the profound slow movement is his avowed response to his spiritual experience of those months. It is entitled "A restored one's holy song of thanksgiving to the divinity, in the Lydian mode" - a very slow-moving mystical hymn (by its mode appearing to be poised between C and F major) in five lines each prefaced by a short phase of restrained polyphony. With this there alternates a joyous andante - a spring of new life, trilled and garlanded with ecstasy. As the hymn is repeated the polyphony becomes wonderfully developed in its expressive detail until at the last this overflows the hymn that persists in transcendental canonic form.

If the Alla marcia is a moment of unfettered joy, a turbulent recitative quickly reinvokes the unresolved challenge of the initial quest, and there follows a passionate and pulsing finale - a rondo in form (but was ever rondo more deeply concerned with the depths of human feeling) until at the last, and under the influence of the motivating 'motto theme' there comes ecstatic joy in the radiance of A major.

S.T.M.N.