

Summer Series 1968

Thursday 16th May 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 D Major (K. 499)

Mozart  
(1756-1791)

Allegretto

Menuetto; Allegretto

Adagio

Allegro

For the reason that this Quartet (sometimes styled 'the Hoffmeister' after its original publisher) is the only one which falls outside the groups of the six quartets dedicated to Haydn and the three which Mozart completed of the intended set of six written for King Frederick William II of Prussia, it receives perhaps far less consideration than it merits. For it has indeed a very special character, different from that of any of the quartets in either group, though prophetic in some respects of the Prussian quartets. As Einstein said "It is worthy of its solitary position." The generous ease and amplitude of the whole is epitomised in the span of the opening unison theme which, as Abert says, "is treated in a way that practically excludes all secondary themes. It recurs again and again, quite unexpectedly . . . " Mozart, in fact, is moving away from the alert contrasts of the dramatic style and the idiomatic phraseology of opera into the wide terrain of monothematic design, and the experience which he here so richly enjoys was to have a lasting effect upon his later works for string ensemble. It is natural that monothematic designs should seek the enrichment of generous modulation, a process which here brings Mozart astonishingly close to Schubert both in utterance and in spirit. The same generous spirit fills the Minuet and overflows in the quasi-canonic response of viola to violin in its last bars. To this the D minor Trio, despite the comparative simplicity of its opening, provides a contrast of considerable contrapuntal complexity.

The Adagio (in G major) is a gloriously spacious movement, serene and deeply moving, and bearing a wealth of expressive detail adorning its ample phrases. The final Allegro, still maintaining a certain relaxation and ease, nevertheless brings with it some stronger contrasts, and touches of merriment from opera buffa emerge in a highly organic design which owes at least as much to the temperament of Rondo as it does to the habits of Sonata form.

2. QUARTET No. 2 (Op.92)

Prokofiev  
(1891-1953)

Allegro sostenuto  
Adagio - Poco piu animato - Tempo I  
Allegro - Andante molto - Allegro

Sergei Prokofiev, virile and productive composer and brilliant pianist, received his training at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. His teachers in composition included Rimsky-Korsakov, Liadov and Tscherepnin, and for pianoforte Annette Essipov. He had already begun to establish a reputation as composer-conductor (e.g. with "Classical Symphony" 1918) before he left Russia for some years to live and work in the U.S.A. and in Paris, but returned to Russia in 1927. His first string quartet (Op.50) was commissioned in 1930 by the Library of Congress, Washington. This second quartet was composed in 1942 whilst Prokofiev was living in the Caucasus whither he had been evacuated by the authorities the previous year. Fascinated by the vivid character of the folk music of Kabarda and Balkara, he drew upon it for the thematic material of this quartet, in which the sturdy rhythm of the folk dance melody and the modal character of the lyrical themes are conspicuous.

Though the title does not state so, the quartet is in F major (with slow movement in the Phrygian-Aeolian realm of E minor-A minor) and there is a basically classical adherence to tonality apart from occasional development in polytonality. The first movement indeed is as clear an exemplar of simple sonata form as one could find in this century.

The Adagio after setting a quiet harmonic background in gentle pulsing rhythm introduces its first simple melody on the 'cello. An overlay of florid arabesque extends about the continuance of this melody (often doubled by violin and 'cello two octaves apart). The triplet motion then assumes a new piquant staccato character as the central episode brings the animation of a delicate violin allegretto accompanied pizzicato or by a spattering of dancing bows, the recapitulation resuming at enhanced pitch with the arabesque enriched melody.

The virile finale quickly juxtaposes the gist of its first two main themes and then opens out in a full scale rondo. The very sturdy strong rondo theme recurring in different registers (and sometimes changing its stamp to a tip-toe dance) alternates with two episodes - the first an impassioned melody above a powerful moto-perpetuo ostinato, the second of delicate tuneful relaxation. Then unexpectedly the touch of a violin scale at the cadence is taken up in all seriousness by the 'cello in an impassioned cadenza (Andante molto) opening out the powerful melodic central episode to which a condensed recapitulation succeeds.

INTERVAL

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 G 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 Ländler 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.