

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1968-69

First Concert

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER

PHILIP CLARK

AUSTIN PATTERSON

DAVID EDWARDS

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 10th OCTOBER, 1968

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

Programme

1. QUARTET IN C (K.465)

Mozart

(1756-1791)

Adagio—Allegro

Andante cantabile

Menuetto (Allegretto)

Allegro molto

The last of the six quartets dedicated to Haydn, this is sometimes nicknamed "the Dissonance" simply because of the startling "false relations" of the opening Adagio. But Mozart's procedure is entirely logical and easily appreciated as such in retrospect. It is a C minor questioning introduction, whose opening poignant phrases over a falling bass condense minor and major harmonies in falling sequence. Aesthetically the whole serves as a foil to the easy sunny optimism which pervades the work from the dawning of the first allegro. Here the serene opening phrase, so amenable to repetition, expansion and answering overlay, dominates a movement which both in mood and in repetitive accompaniment shows much affinity to the later great C major Quintet. First theme, transition, leisurely cadence—passage, the development (with increasing tension), recapitulation with subtle variation of accompaniment, and finally the coda with its delicate chromatic inflection—all grow from this one pregnant phrase. A lively contrast is afforded by the "second subject" group of themes—first a robust and vivacious acclamation, preparing for the more delicate sway of triplet motifs to which Mozart not infrequently resorted in his secondary themes.

The F major Andante, of exquisite tenderness, unfolds in simple lyrical binary form, its melody decoratively enhanced on its return. Composure is sustained by the curled phraselet turned in gentle dialogue between violin and 'cello which leads by transition to an entrancing quiet overlay of mounting entries, so like that which later inspires the woodwind in the Andante of the E flat Symphony (K.453). In the coda quiet repetition of this in the minor key is richly expanded before yielding to infinite calm with the benediction of a new serene melody spreading over all.

The animated Minuet sways and plunges between delicate ripple and forthright ejaculation; the melody of the contrasting Trio in the minor is led by first violin until eventually it emerges on the 'cello.

The finale sounds and looks and behaves like a gay rondo. What matter if anyone can prove that, strictly speaking, it isn't? To argue the point is only to find oneself of a sudden side-stepped by a magic spell of melody in a far-off key—yes, and yet again—and bound at last to succumb to the naive gaiety of those dancing fifths which, as like as not, were filched from Haydn's pocket!

2. QUARTET No. 1, Op. 25

Britten
(b.1913)

Andante sostenuto—Allegro vivo—Andante—

Allegro—Andante

Allegretto con slancio

Andante calmo

Molto vivace

The quartet was composed in 1941 when Britten was in America, for the Coolidge Quartet. Though not stated in the title, it is fundamentally a quartet in D major with scherzo in F major and slow movement in B flat. But Britten's clustered harmonies, with much use of concordant seconds and sevenths, are his own language and his methods of modulation very original. So too is his formal design. The two alternating tempi with their extreme contrast between ethereal calm and tempestuously vigorous activity are basic to the first movement, but within the vigorous allegro there is first an extensive singing melody for violin as a main theme repeated twice again with canonic imitations first at the tenth above and then simultaneously at the third and the fifth. The second subject appears with a certain quietening to pianissimo as a light line of scalic ascent and descent leading to resumption of the introductory Andante now in F. The development arises from the second theme with elements of the first below becoming increasingly prominent and indeed aggressive until recapitulation emerges in full force. Ultimately the extremes of tempo and mood stand side by side in close alternation.

The extreme contrast of dynamics again pervades the staccato scherzo which thows out from its brittle points little jets of triplet figure, now brusque, now liquified into a flowing theme, the whole designed on the basis of alternating two ideas.

The Andante calmo, in 5/4 throughout, is a simple song-like movement in ternary form, the central phrase being more animated and adding to elements of the song melody a widely slung declamatory arpeggio figure that revolves about the melodic line, the recapitulation bringing moments of inversion and condensation of the opening song.

The finale kicks off in great good humour with a rough-and-tumble fugato which in time launches the 'cello on to an aggressive ostinato against the voluminous-toned melody poured out by the other strings in unison. All this vigour is eventually whittled away into softest shades and fragmentation from which its motives emerge in wisps of legato and delicate pizzicato before they mount to the ultimate climax with a jubilation of swinging bells.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET IN E FLAT, Op. 127

Beethoven

Maestoso—Allegro

(1770-1827)

Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile—Andante con
moto—Adagio molto espressivo—Tempo I

Scherzando vivace—Presto—Tempo I

Finale: Allegro—Allegro comodo

This performance tonight opens the series of the late Beethoven quartets presented in sequence. Each of the five quartets stands of course as an individual entity in itself; but the aesthetic and spiritual significance of each is the more fully apprehended if we can perchance relive them in that sequence of experience which adheres to the true order in which they were brought to completion. The E flat, Op. 127 and the F major, Op. 135 lie rather apart from the others, the one a glorious portal to a world of new vision, the other an epilogue; whereas the middle three—the A minor, Op. 132, the B flat, Op. 130 with its true conclusion the overwhelming *Grosse Fugue*, and the C sharp minor Op. 131—are both thematically and emotionally very closely interrelated.

At the very centre, in fact, tower the indomitable peaks of the great fugue itself, to be assailed only from the sunlit foothills that spread below it in the miscellaneous beauty of the B flat's many movements which alone acclimatise the spirit for such arduous endeavour. And the rugged motto of the fugue is itself the core of thought transfigured into the quiet mysticism which is the initial experience from which both the A minor and C sharp minor quartets proceed.

Ideally one could wish to be able to fulfill the whole experience within a day or two, without any distracting descent from the land of the Delectable Mountains. But not even recitals of the complete Beethoven quartets can quite achieve that rarified experience for us, and in these present concerts the listener must perforce be content to bring together experiences separated by interludes of several weeks.

Beethoven was not an old man when he composed them in 1824-6 (fourteen years after his previous quartet Op. 95). He was only in his middle fifties, but his musical (and indeed his personal) life had covered a vast field of elemental human experience, and here now all seems transfigured as an ultimate vision irradiated by an infinite joy and a compassion that is above sorrow. Beethoven is said to have declared himself without any fear for the future of his music "for whoever understands it must be free of all the misery which others bear about with them."

Such surely is the confident proclamation that opens this quartet, twice repeated in the course of this transfigured sonata movement. But this is just the assurance granted to that very ecstasy of delight which, throughout the work, is to reiterate its melodies and the turn of phrases with infinite variety as too precious to let pass away. Both in the first and last movements melodic phrases revolve as if in perpetuity, extended and repeated, moving from one to another instrument over the whole realm of musical space.

The same infinite extensibility spreads, with slowest swing of pendulum, in the glorious continuity of theme and variations in A flat major—perhaps the most wonderful enlargement and adornment of the wide spaces of the spiritual world which Beethoven ever attained by this means. Contrasting with this quiet, rich, compassionate beauty, the vitally alert Scherzo is carried on the impetus of one short rhythmical figure reiterated time and again, now delicately light, now aggressively exuberant. The Finale makes of sonata form a rondel of tender melody and exultant march, of such ecstasy as need never end, until at last it broadens its loveliest phrase into a sunset coda of tranquillity and glorious colour.

S.T.M.N.