

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1968-69

Fifth Concert

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER

PHILIP CLARK

AUSTIN PATTERSON

DAVID EDWARDS

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 9th JANUARY, 1969

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

Programme

1. QUARTET IN C SHARP MINOR, Op. 131 (1826)

Beethoven

(1770-1827)

Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo—
Allegro molto vivace—
Allegro moderato—
Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile—
Presto—
Adagio quasi un poco andante
Allegro.

The quartet is in seven movements which are designed to follow one another without interruption of any kind. Two of these however are by way of preface to succeeding movements. No less remarkable than the continuity of the whole is the perfection of the cycle of forms comprising Fugue, Binary (Suite) Form, Recitative, Variation, Rondo-Scherzo, Lied and Sonata Form. The circle of keys employed is also remarkable: C sharp minor, D major, F sharp minor, A major, E major, G sharp minor, C sharp minor. But the most important aesthetic fact is the psychological progression from the mystic serenity of the Fugue, through the lilting pleasure of spiritualised dance, the profound and radiant joy of the Andante, the utterly carefree exhilaration of the Scherzo, to the sobering moment of the introductory Lied to which succeeds a finale whose combination of vital resolute activity, exhilaration, compassion and reflection comprises such a subtle personality as might be expected rather in the first than the last movement. But there is the point. This quartet is surely a progression back to the normal active person after the supreme effort of the conflict in the Grosse Fugue (the original and, as I believe, the essential conclusion of the Op. 130)—a conflict as of Joseph with the angel.

The opening Fugue moves gently forward, ever circling about the axis of repose. All that analysis might point to as the device of contrapuntal art, diminution which brings a gentle breeze of animation, changed accent which forges the chains of new melodies, augmentation and stretto—all these express the perfection of the self reliance attained.

The cadence of the fugue lifted a semitone floats away into a dance of ecstasy whose lilting measure, now rising to exuberant joy, now falling to quiet hesitancy, can be trod only by the spirit that has known the Elysian plains. The fateful motive of the Great Fugue is itself transfigured as a song of radiant happiness.

The questioning recitative finds its first answer in the rich freedom of the variations, sublime with a gentle ecstasy that can be sought elsewhere only amongst Beethoven's greatest variations, such as the Pianoforte Trio Op. 97, the Sonatas Op. 109 and Op. 111, and the Diabelli. The theme whose phrases fall from one violin to the other in unbroken succession is already varied in the repetition of each of its two sections, and this constant progressive variation in the written out repeats is characteristic of the whole set. In the graces which adorn the latter part of the second variation one feels a thrill as of returning spring. The third quickens to a measured scherzo wherein arpeggios stretch out on either hand as far as the arms can reach. The fourth reveals its mysteries in canon at the second to which

a second purposive figure marching upward with deliberate trills adds a sense of resolution. The graceful ease of the scherzo variation is generously enlarged in the fifth (Adagio), whilst in the sixth rhythm and melody are obscured to the point where only a harmonic schema remains. If ever man achieved the embodiment of the philosophers' "universal" it is here. The succeeding Adagio variation with the fulness of its swaying triple measures is of such a beauty as must heal all sores. It is followed by an extensive coda of fantasia which between moments of reflection upon the simple allegretto melody falls to trilling with the ecstasy of lark song, until the tender phrases uncoil and dissolve, to vanish at the touch of pizzicati.

The following Presto is a scherzo with a five-fold scheme of alternation. Its dancing theme is itself a rondo perpetually drawing itself up to look questioningly over the brink and slipping back into its carefree measure. The trio section consists of two melodies of divine simplicity, the second of which sings ever onwards in four-bar phrases of unexpected accentuation. In such intervals as the dancing accompaniment can detect it entertains itself in a relay of rapid exchange, whilst the *da capo* is tackled by means of a conundrum of pizzicati which proves to have a different solution when it is proposed a second time. For a third time the trio melodies suggest themselves, but the scherzo theme dancing with lightest touch in the high octave intervenes and descends to put an emphatic end to the revelry.

The expressive song of the Adagio sobers the mood and prepares a way for the Allegro finale, which seems to proclaim "wherefore let a man rejoice in his own work," for the theme of conflict is tensely uttered and accepted in exultation. The theme of the opening fugue is transformed to a song of compassion, and amidst the busy scene of work pursued with a ready will there come moments of mystic contemplation which retire from the turmoil only to find refreshment for the task of proclaiming a triumphant joy fashioned out of the stuff of adversity.

2. QUARTET IN F MAJOR, Op. 135

Beethoven

Allegretto
Vivace
Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo
"Der schwer gefasste Entschluss": Grave—Allegro

When Beethoven headed the last movement of this his last quartet with the epitaph "The difficult decision," quoting its two main motives labelled as question "Must it be?" and answer "It must be," he seems to have posed a problem far more troublesome than any of Elgar's enigmas! Some, supposing Beethoven in his incipient last illness to have meant and known this to be his last work (though in fact a new alternative finale to the Op. 130 quartet was written after this), look upon this question and joyously resolute answer as signifying the composer's decision as to how he shall bring himself full circle and say his last say. Others tell tales of the landlady's bill to be paid—the last movement must be written to raise the wind, or of an importunate request for a Beethoven quartet "in the parts"—"must he pay for it?"—"he must!" To my thinking it is quite irrelevant to this music that Beethoven was ill and unusually difficult, in one of his "naughty boy" moods (as one writer puts it) or in need of cash, when he set about writing this work. The simple fact remains that the finale poses a question (words or no words) urgently and in great perturbation of spirit, and answers it resolutely and joyously and at the last tiptoes to Elysium with a final shout of exultation as the curtain falls. Whether this is autobiographical or no is of no real account. The only

autobiographical significance is that the whole quartet is the aftermath to the three great quartets, Op. 132, Op. 130 and Op. 131—in relation to these the whole work is an epilogue. It has been said that “its imaginative significance is infinitely less” than that of the other late quartets. I cannot accept this at all. It achieves something not less but quite different from their profound and richly varied sphere of thought and emotion.

In the C major, Op. 59, No. 3, Beethoven began from the point of sheer void, nothingness, and answered this by seizing with exhilaration upon motifs and formulae that are more normally associated with the final celebrations of a spirited allegro. Here there is no mystery in the starting point but one must recognise that the opening Allegretto presupposes that one has already travelled to such a level of spiritual exaltation as one reaches, for example, in the last variation of the Diabelli, or found grace in the benediction of the A major Andante of Op. 131. It is not a case of “all passion spent” but all transfigured. Can the gods be bothered with landladies’ bills, or with musical analysis? They laugh for sheer joy.

INTERVAL

3. STRING QUARTET IN G MAJOR, Op. 77 No. 1

Haydn

Allegro moderato
Adagio
Menuetto: Presto
Finale: Presto

The two quartets of Opus 77, Haydn’s last quartets apart from the unfinished quartet of 1803, were composed in 1799 (a year after the completion of the wonderful group of six published as Op. 76) and dedicated to the Prince Lobkowitz to whom Beethoven dedicated so many of his greater works a few years later.

It was ever characteristic of Haydn to pose themes which appear to intimate a predictable career, but which in fact are found to develop upon a quite unpredictable course to unpredictable conclusions. So it is in this opening movement, where the first theme apparently invades the territory of the second, and this latter after enjoying ample room and a wide selection of keys in the middle section is content to leave only the legacy of its dancing triplet figure to preserve its memory thereafter.

The slow movement (E flat major) is remarkable in particular for the wonderful change of colouring which its opening melody acquires as it moves from the violin to the depths of the ’cello, and from near familiar keys to those undreamed of until the magic touch reveals how close they lie about the common way.

In his Op. 33 quartets Haydn had labelled his Minuets as Scherzi. Here he composes a veritable Scherzo with an astonishingly Beethovenian “Trio” all to be played Presto, and somehow allows it to be labelled Menuetto. However he is not the only traveller to infuriate officialdom by omitting to strip old labels off his trunk. As for the Finale, it sounds like a Rondo, it behaves like a Rondo, and anyone with a latchkey can prove to you that it isn’t. For my part I think it is what it sounds like.

S.T.M.N.