

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY CHAMBER CONCERTS

Programme 1/-

Summer Series 1969

Thursday 17th April 1969 at 7.30 p.m.

Reid School of Music

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

Miles Baster

Philip Clark

Austin Patterson

David Edwards

Programme

1. QUARTET in C major, Op. 54, No.2

Haydn

(1732-1809)

Vivace

Adagio

Menuetto: Allegretto

Finale: Adagio - Presto - Adagio

The four movements of this great quartet (composed in 1788) are all written in the key of C, but the Adagio with profoundly moving effect juxtaposes the sombre depths of the minor mode to the exceptionally spacious brightness of the opening Allegro, and in the third movement the trio reverts to the same contrast in modality, most poignantly transforming and echoing a strain from its gentle and easeful Minuet. The Adagio is indeed one of the most deeply inspired and freely conceived passages in all Haydn's works. Admittedly its formal structure is simple enough - a sustained melody of eight-bar phrases, harmonised with some sonority, of the simple design AABA. But after the first phrase, the first violin, leaving the other instruments to sustain this melody, is inspired to extemporise with the utmost freedom and spontaneity a most profoundly eloquent and moving fantasy of decorative device. (Although not dissimilar to the decorative device per figuram retardationis which Haydn employed in the Adagio of the great F minor Quartet, Op. 20, No. 5, the conception here is far bolder whilst the rhythmical freedom of the line here taxes the resources of musical notation to a quite exceptional extent.)

The Finale opens with an Adagio which might at first suggest itself as being but an introduction to a sustained Presto. But, in fact, the Presto proves to be a brief episodic taste of a might-have-been Rondo, whilst the Adagio unfolds on spacious lines carried upon the broad arches of violoncello arpeggio whose spans reach from the depths of diapason C to the topmost heights of the harmonic structure. Here again emotional contrast is found in turning directly to the minor mode.

S.T.M.N.

2. QUARTET No. 2, Op. 17

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

Moderato

Allegro molto capriccioso

Lento

Bartók's second String Quartet - completed in 1917 when he was thirty-six and first performed in Budapest in the following year by the Quartet Waldbauer-Kerpely to whom it is dedicated - marks an important turning-point in his creative development. For it belongs to the very first works in which fingerprints of Bartók's mature style become visible. An increasingly complex idiom of chromatic harmony is here (perhaps for the first time) applied to primitive melodic material of Hungarian peasant origin. Bartók's later obsession with tiny motif-particles rather than with elongated melodic paragraphs, but also his life-long aim at closest thematic integration can be noticed in the two slow flanking movements in which identical thematic cells are utilised.

The principal melody of the first movement, given to the first Violin and extending over bars 2 to 6 is a case in point. It presents, surely quite fortuitously, an almost complete twelve-note series (e-a-d-c sharp-g natural-b flat-g double sharp-f sharp-f natural-e flat-d flat) but only its incipit of five notes, with the intervals of rising and falling Fourths, is turned into a determinant of the whole work. That five note incipit, which pervades the predominantly lyrical first movement as a kind of haunting bird-cry, returns later on to express the introspective gloom of the third movement (g sharp-c sharp-f-c-b flat, in bars 11 and 12). Quartet No. 2 is planned, like its predecessor Op. 8, in three movements of which only the initial one approximately conforms to the traditional pattern of Sonata-form. In it the cantabile subject (cue f) is only a subtle transformation of the initial five-note-motif and the effect of thematic contrast is shifted to the conclusion group, a three-note-motif and its inversion which, on the occasion of its recapitulatory return near the end of the movement, is presented as a product of bitonality. The melody in the upper strings, with its rising and falling Fourth and its quaint folk-tune-like flavour, progresses in A minor and D minor while its chordal pizzicato-accompaniment in the Cello sticks to A major and D major with gentle persistence.

As the first movement favoured the interval of the rising and falling Fourth, the second movement, a kind of primitive and ferocious Rondo, propelled by the irresistible momentum of its staccato rhythm (an unmistakable feature of Hungarian folk-dance!) seems chiefly determined by the Tritone and the minor Third. Their constant reiteration produces motif-patterns, and a kind of crude background harmony is being provided by a system of pedal-points (mainly utilising open strings). The savagery of this perpetuum mobile-like Scherzo reaches its climax in the final Stretto, relying entirely on a frenzied repetition of the three-note-motif, f sharp-f natural-d.

The reflective gloom of the final "Lento" comes as a shattering anti-climax. It functions as a psychological "flash-back" to the two preceding movements. However, the five-note "bird-cry" motif of movement 1 as well as the Tritone of the Scherzo now reappear in the weird elongation of a "slow-motion" picture. The falling/

The falling Fourth again begins to dominate the music which, particularly in the accelerando of its final climax, seems to express the approach of some fatal and irrevocable event. The final ten bars, as it were, epitomize the fundamental tension of the whole work in its basic intervallic form. They present a succession of expressionless, disjointed major Thirds and Fourths, with the three-note-motif of the middle movement wistfully trailing off in the last utterance of the first Violin.

(Note written in 1958 for these concerts
by the late Professor Hans Redlich)

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET No. 2 (1945)

Ernest Bloch
(b. 1880)

Moderato

Presto - Moderato - Allegro molto - Meno mosso - Allegro molto

Andante

Allegro molto - Passacaglia - Fuga - Epilogue (calmo)

Whilst it is true of the greater part of Bloch's music that, as Eric Blom has said, "there is in Bloch's creative equipment a certain preponderance of extra-musical thought over purely musical imagination," the observation is entirely inapplicable to this great quartet. The first three movements, whether in reflective fantasy as in the first and third movements or in the full vigour of impetuous rhythmical drive as in the second, adumbrate themes and the partial figures of themes which are to find their full significance and their full stature in the gigantic finale, which is the fulfilment of the whole. The revelance of much in the earlier movements is thus only fully revealed in the last.

For the analyst it is easier to identify some of the themes as first adumbrated in terms of their definitive forms and functions in the finale, but the true experience of the whole is that of the listener witnessing the progress of the music from first things to last things, catching glimpses of themes now tentative, now more clearly defined, now epitomised, now expanded and elaborated. Thus the very first decorative turn of the solo violin in its opening ruminative fantasy expands into a quiet sustained melody in the middle of the first movement, and reappears tentatively in the third movement, before it is blazoned out in the turbulently rhythmical opening of the finale and once again at the culmination of the fugue. The sighing sevenths twice heard in the first movement form a distinctive feature of the ultimate passacaglia-fugue subject, whilst the first ejaculatory phrase of the Presto delivers the opening of that subject, for the present employed under a number of guises, and this again is the main topic in the opening of the third movement. Nevertheless, each movement also contains material proper to itself, often of a sustained melodic character such as that introduced first by the viola in the Presto. The quiet melody in clear triple-measure introduced four times in the course of the third movement finds its apotheosis in the grand climax in which the final fugue culminates, when it succeeds the blazoned theme already mentioned and with its breadth and grandeur brings the great marathon of energy to the stance of a calm epilogue wherein this melody and the fugue are quietly entwined, and the ever-striving harmonies are at length resolved on a sure D major.

S.T.M.N.