

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY CHAMBER CONCERTS

Programme 1/-

Summer Series 1969

Thursday, 8th May 1969 at 7.30 p.m.

Reid School of Music

THE EDINBURGH QUARTETMiles Baster Philip Clark
Austin Patterson David Edwards

with Alan Beers (Violoncello)

Programme

1. QUARTET in F major, Op. 59, No. 1

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro

Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando

Adagio molto e mesto -

Allegro (Theme Russe)

Beethoven's three quartets (Op. 59), composed in 1806, were dedicated to Count Rasumofsky, Russian Ambassador to the Austrian Court, in whose house they received their first performance.

The largeness of design and of the musical thought that inspires it is immediately apparent in the great sweep (of 19 bars length) of the initial theme which mounts from the dolce cantabile of the violoncello to the peak of a tutti fortissimo. Everything is roomy and large - the transition, the second subject and, above all, the development which opens as though repeating *da capo*, but opens out into new territory of immense breadth which embraces an unforeseen fugato derived from a figure of the main theme. Copy-book analysts might quarrel as to the precise point of the recapitulation for the reason that it is reached by a resumption of the subsidiary part (20th bar) of the main theme before it actually happens; but for the listener there is no doubt at all, when the grip of fortissimo is released.

The Allegretto Scherzando is a scherzo of an unusual type which Beethoven first explored in the C minor Quartet of Op. 18. Commentators have tended to emphasise the fact that it is a scherzo in sonata form and one writer has claimed that nearly everything is duplicated in it - two first subjects, two transitions! But anyone with a grain of humour (or of commonsense, which is or ought to be the same thing) will perceive that the delicate impertinence of such a scherzo theme has an inalienable right to all the privileges of expected and unexpected re-entry that belong to a rondo, whether or no it bothers about rondo-form. And, if there is both delicate humour and tremendous latent power in the initial drum-tapping of the 'cello, there is also in it the capacity to evoke a new lyricism as it approaches the recapitulation.

The gloriously sustained Adagio is a movement of profound sorrow, but the emotion is much deeper and much richer than pure melancholy. At the last, it resolves not in any final cadence but on a tone of expectation which with the free/

free spill of cadenza (or fantasy) bridges the way to the finale. This is based as a starting point upon a Russian folk melody announced by the violoncello. Folksong melodies are by nature designed to make for cumulative effect by repetition. Beethoven shows his realisation of that essential fact both in the E minor Quartet (Op. 59, No. 2) and also here. For, although this movement is in sonata form and for large stretches concerned with strenuous tutti utterances, the coda, with its lingering thoughts, reminds us of the special effect made by the recurrences of this melodic theme.

----- INTERVAL -----

2. QUINTET in C major (Op. 163)

Schubert
(1797-1828)

Allegro ma non troppo

Adagio

Scherzo: Presto - Trio: Andante sostenuto

Allegretto

It is difficult to restrain emotion in speaking or writing upon this wonderful quintet, Schubert's supreme instrumental work. Not many months before he died Schubert heard a performance of the Beethoven C sharp minor Quartet (Op. 131), which moved him so deeply that he was quite beside himself. That same autumn he composed this great work (and his last three great pianoforte sonatas) - yet he never heard it played, and indeed it was first performed only about 22 years after his death and published a few years later still. It was this quintet which inspired Brahms to compose his great sextets and quintets - indeed Brahms' Pianoforte quintet was first conceived for strings only exactly upon this model. Certain comments are obvious - that Schubert favoured the double-'cello ensemble employed by Boccherini rather than the Mozartian model with two violas: that a second 'cello means the addition not merely of another bass but of an instrument which is free to be used throughout its whole range, and in particular, in its tenor register. But Boccherini knew nothing of the richness of such an ensemble, nor dreamt for one moment of such visions as are here unfolded. When all is said and done, verbal comments are as clumsy and superfluous here as marginalia are beside the perfection of a poem of Keats. The only commentary lies here and there in some of the finest of Schubert's other music. Thus the slow movement of Schubert's last (B flat) sonata is analagous to, though less profound than, the E major Adagio here - for this moves from perfect tranquillity to the extreme of anguished emotion - a disturbance of spirit analagous to, but yet more searching than, that from which the confident gaiety of the finale marches forth in the Octet. Elsewhere than here one may find a trio section in serious mood contrasting with a scherzo of unfettered happiness, but the Andante sostenuto here is quite unique in its depth of emotion. In rhythm, tempo of thought and, indeed, in spirit itself, we are removed on the instant from the superb triumph of a symphonic scherzo to quite another sphere of human existence.

One feels that the whole of Schubert is enshrined in this work. If there is one thought that will linger long in the mind's ear after the day is done, it may well be that undying melody of the first movement which comes to us in the magic moment when by simply turning upon the heel (or upon a single note) we look upon a new horizon in utter quietude.