

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1969-70

First Concert

THE
EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER

PHILIP CLARK

AUSTIN PATTERSON

DAVID EDWARDS

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 9th OCTOBER, 1969

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

Programme

1. STRING QUARTET IN F

Ravel
(1875-1937)

Allegro moderato
Assez vif—très rythmé
Très lent
Vif et agité

This work was written in 1902—the year in which Debussy produced “Pelleas et Mélisande”—when Ravel was twenty-seven years of age. It is dedicated to “mon cher maître, Gabriel Fauré” and, if any influence is traceable in the style, it is surely that of the fastidious elegance of that composer.

The first movement opens with a flowing melody containing in its first bars a figure which, if not quite an “*idée fixe*” keeps finding its way into later movements. The second theme, of which two bars would identify the composer, is scored two octaves apart with light accompaniment. A fine flow of melody carries the development to a big climax after which the recapitulation follows quite in the classical tradition, with, however, the adroit management of the second theme which, although given a quite different harmonic slant, reappears at exactly the original pitch.

The second movement exhibits a wealth of devices exploiting the possibilities of colour obtainable from four strings—ranging from the guitar-like pizzicato of the opening to the variety of effects displayed in the muted middle section. In hesitant mood the third movement begins, bringing with it presently soft reminiscences of the opening theme of the Quartet. An expressive theme appears in the viola and as it dies away, the little figure steals in again and the mood of hesitancy returns. A new theme emerges in the second violin, and leads eventually to an impassioned climax. The climax subsides and the first movement figure combined with fragments of the opening of the movement intervenes, leading to the recapitulation. The fourth movement vigorously dispels the languors of the third with a 5/8 figure in persistent double-bowing. The second group of themes are derivatives of themes from the first movement—the “cyclic thematic development” which Ravel used in several of his chamber-music works. After the recapitulation a short brilliant coda concludes the work.

(Note by the late DR. MARY GRIERSON)

2. STRING QUARTET No. 2

Kenneth Leighton
(b. 1929)

Molto Adagio—Allegro—Presto
Marcia Lenta
Allegro Energico
Epilogo ; Lento

This work was completed in 1957 and first performed by the New Edinburgh Quartet in the same year. In 1959 it was chosen as one of the works representing this country at the International Music Council (U.N.E.S.C.O.) in Paris, and has since been performed in the U.S.A. and Japan.

The opening Adagio presents what might be called the motto-theme, a wedge-shaped tune which moves chromatically outwards, and is characterized by the semi-tone and whole-tone relationship. The rest of the material in both Allegro and Presto sections derives from this opening, except for a syncopated scale-figure which first appears in the Presto. At the climax of the movement the theme of the Adagio is brought back by the 'cello in counterpoint against the lively material of the Presto.

Viola and 'cello begin the Slow March with a tune in dotted rhythm, but the second subject (of a more lyrical and sustained character) is soon heard on the first violin, poised above the march-tune. A mysterious transition leads to an extended working-out of the second subject, *sempre alla marcia*.

The third movement is in the manner of an energetic Scherzo which gives little respite to either players or audience. There are two distinct themes. The first uses the mixture of major and minor thirds: the second (heard first on the viola) derives its character from repeated notes and unequal rhythms. 5/8 here becomes the basic pattern. The development of these two tunes is mainly contrapuntal, but a contrasting middle section allows the first violin to soar with a more lyrical version of subject II. The two tunes then unite to form a single fugue-subject, and from here to the end there is little time to breathe.

The Epilogue is played pianissimo almost throughout, and its first chromatic theme has an obviously close relationship to the motto-theme. The second tune, on the other hand, aims to be as simple as possible and completely diatonic. Towards the end of the movement the two ideas come together: the chromatic theme fades into accompaniment, enclosed by the diatonic tune above and below. But it is clear which of them triumphs in the end.

K.L.

INTERVAL

3. QUARTET IN E MINOR, OP. 59, No. 2

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro

Molto Adagio (con molto di sentimento)

Allegretto

Finale: Presto—Più Presto

The three quartets of Op. 59 were composed in 1806-7, and dedicated (on publication in 1808) to Count Rasumovsky, the Russian ambassador at Vienna. Rasumovsky, himself a violinist, formed his own quartet in 1808 with Schuppanzigh as leader, and this famous quartet continued long after Rasumovsky had left Vienna, indeed until Schuppanzigh's death in 1830.

Although it opens with the sharpest possible point of definition, this first movement is so freely plastic in its phrasing, so sensitive in its emotional reactions—now tentative, now plaintive, now exuberant, again imbued with a quiet lyrical ecstasy—that a summary analysis of the whole is impossible. The tension which underlies the whole is focussed in the great impasse of a minor-ninth which is reached in the coda and relaxed though scarcely resolved in the final bars.

It has been claimed by some that the human capacity for thinking in slow motion does not allow of a beat slower than about two seconds' duration except some intermediary points are introduced and perceptible enough to carry one over the span of the pendulum's swing. Be that as it may, we have in the opening melody of this glorious E major slow movement a most profoundly beautiful illustration of the space embraced in a melody that moves with a quite exceptionally slow pulse. The melody itself permeates a great part of the movement (which is in sonata form), but is clothed with exquisite though simple decorative rhythmical patterns which set up their own quicker pulses, sometimes of quietly alert fanfare, sometimes of even flowing lines.

The quiet and persistent sway of syncopation in the *Allegretto* mounts at times to an impasse of fortissimo but resolves always into the lighter touch of its earlier measures. The major Trio section with which this twice alternates celebrates that same Russian theme which Moussorgsky was to use in the coronation scene of Boris Godounov. It is essentially a repetitive theme, and so Beethoven uses it with cumulative effect culminating in a glorious jangling collision of multiple-canon.

The finale is a rondo of sturdy humour which, in a manner much akin to that of the G major Pianoforte Concerto (No. 4), uses a perversely oblique approach with the utmost relish. The pathway it has to tread (ultimately) is E minor, but it starts in C major, and the moment it comes anywhere near to E minor it slides or stamps its way around to C and starts off again. Eventually it moves on to find its second subject in B minor but soon after starts chasing its tail like a dog in a tight spin, and comes out of this game only to start marching away in C major again. But the rest of the tale needs no telling.

S.T.M.N.