

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1969-70

Second Concert

PIANOFORTE RECITAL

MICHAEL LESTER-CRIBB

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 23rd OCTOBER, 1969

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

Programme

1. FIFTEEN VARIATIONS WITH A FUGUE, ON A THEME
FROM "PROMETHEUS." Op. 35. (1802) *Beethoven*
(1770-1827)
2. IMAGES—SET I. (1905) *Debussy*
(1862-1918)
Reflète dans l'eau
Hommage à Rameau
Mouvement
3. VARIATIONS. (1950) *Lester-Cribb*
(born 1928)
4. SONATA NO. 2 IN ONE MOVEMENT. (1962) *Tippett*
(born 1905)
5. IMAGES—SET II. (1907) *Debussy*
Cloches à travers les feuilles
Et la lune descend sur la temple qui fut
Poissons d'or
6. CHACONNE. Op. 32. (1916) *Nielsen*
(1865-1931)

Sixty-odd years after the writing of Debussy's "Images," the effects of this architecture-less music are perhaps just beginning to seem inevitable. A (reasonably selective) survey of the music of Bartok, for instance, written between the time of "Images" and the 1920's, prompts one to believe that that composer would have been noticeably limited had Debussy not opened the doors; while Messiaen and Boulez would surely have been groping around in a horizonless wilderness of sound.

Of course there is more than one way of thinking about architecture: if the fact that a work of art is the right size for its material is the criterion, then Debussy was an architect, but if an inner logic, a sense of "development," is looked for, we shall not find it in "Images." Significantly, the one piece of the six which is blatantly in a classical form—the ternary shaped "Mouvement"—is demonstrably the weakest; which is not to say that it is ineffective. For sheer musical perfection (because here Debussy is being most completely himself) let me draw attention to "Poissons d'or," with only the reservation that it is a pity, from the player's point of view, that Ravel did not have a watery hand in the layout of the last page!

Building a recital around Debussy's works (as I was asked to) poses the question of what aspect of music to take to hold the programme together. To have dwelt on impressionist or representational music would have made for too little variety, so I chose the very characteristic discussed above—lack of development: which has resulted in an interesting comparison of approaches to the writing of variations.

Beethoven's set is monumental; a gigantic definition of the key of E flat major—but what emotional power is released in the process! He begins, as he was later to do in the last movement of his Third Symphony, by stating the bass. He gradually dresses it, and not until it is fully clothed does he present the "Theme" proper. The succeeding variations are very clearly anchored to both Bass and Theme—even the long slow variation is an exact bar by bar treatment until the C minor coda is reached. This coda dissolves into the fugue whose subject is the first four notes of the Bass. The final pages, with their spacious treatment of the Theme, again remind one of the Symphony. (The other work with which this music is thematically connected—"The Men of Prometheus"—was, despite its higher opus number, composed a year before the variations).

My own "Variations" deals principally with two musical elements: an oscillating melody of increasing and decreasing intervals, and a harmonic build up of alternate major and minor thirds. The piece begins with what I call "Variation I" rather than "Theme," because the material is presented somewhat loosely. Variations 2 to 7 discuss details heard in Variation I, and the last variation combines the two main ideas in their most theme-like form. There are no complete breaks between variations, though in each one the prevailing tonality of A comes under a new pressure.

The third set of variations—Nielsen's magnificent Chaconne—is best left to speak for itself through the span of its shattering emotional programme: suffice it to point out that the apparent freedom of phrase structure is achieved in harness with an almost strict eight bar frame-work, until the gentle flowering of the three-fold coda.

This leaves the Tippett work to be discussed; which, of all the music in this programme, and despite its title of "Sonata," is the most innocent of the device of development. There are eight "subjects," contracted in texture, dynamic marking and speed. They are stated in a seemingly random order, some of them being heard several times before all eight have appeared. The subjects are juxtaposed with no links, but considerable use is made of silence as a special case of sound. The lack of development is compensated for in two ways; firstly there is no *exact* repetition; and secondly, during the first two-thirds of the sonata the "subjects" are presented in increasingly long quotations, while towards the end they tend to become more and more fragmentary. Described in words this sounds a risky structure, but Tippett's power of invention and his innate sense of shape mould it into a balanced and satisfying work of art.

Since writing these notes I have come across a paragraph by Boulez—it would be apposite to conclude by quoting from it:

"He (Debussy) is strongly repelled by those shabby constructive jugglings which transform the composer into an infantile architect. For him, form is never *given*; his whole life was a search for the unanalysable, for development that, even in its procedures, would incorporate the surprises of the imagination. He mistrusted architecture in its petrified sense; he preferred structures that mixed precision and free will . . ."

If one does not confuse the mental procedures of a creative artist with the findings of a misdirected analyst, those words could surely be applied to—well, say Beethoven.

D. M. L.-C.

