

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1969-70

Fifth Concert

MOZART QUINTETS

THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

MILES BASTER

PHILIP CLARK

AUSTIN PATERSON

DAVID EDWARDS

WITH

Viola: JAMES DURRANT

Horn: PETER LEWIS

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 4th DECEMBER, 1969

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

Programme

1. STRING QUINTET IN G MINOR (K. 516)

Allegro
Menuetto. Allegretto
Adagio ma non troppo
Adagio—Allegro

It is natural that this quintet and the G minor symphony should be associated in our minds, for not only have both the same prevailing emotion, which Abert writing of the quintet describes as "the resignation of despair, a struggle with destiny," but there are also many details of theme and treatment which are common to both. But whereas the symphony, finding some measure of consolation and strength in its middle movements, renews the conflict with desperate intensity at the end, the quintet, more deeply involved in the emotional struggle which is sustained with only partial relief through four movements, ultimately finds once more the joy of life in its rondo finale. There is a good deal of truth in Abert's observation that the struggle with destiny "does not, as with Beethoven, carry with it from the outset the certainty of victory, but rather expresses a self-tormenting surrender to the inevitable. The joy of life in the finale celebrates no Beethovenish triumph over a previous struggle with fate, but is of purely artistic origin; it is the pressure of inner creative power which stirs the artist and simultaneously raises his vitality." This appreciation throws perhaps too great an emphasis upon resignation. For this work is far from presenting the somewhat pathological case of such work as the Pianoforte Rondo in A minor, which for all its beauty is a trifle too indulgent over its own tearfulness. On the contrary the struggle here is passionate, and it is the emotional conflict and no exigency of form which determines the many vital developments. Very possibly the ultimate happiness attained might have been revealed as the prize of victory rather than as the gift of compassionate gods to one who has endured to the end if it were not for the tendency of Mozart's creative power to polarise his thought into opposite or complementary ideas. Thus from the one birth two stars sprang as Heavenly Twins to shine beside each other in the musical firmament, but not of like image as are most earthly twins. For the C major quintet (finished a month earlier) has a spacious repose, an architectural strength and unthwarted happiness, which are inevitably denied to its brother.

In the statement of the opening theme the instruments divide into two groups contrasted in register and colour, the first viola doing double duty. The theme is broken into short fragmentary phrases bound together by an accompaniment of repeated notes whose quiet obstinacy persists throughout the greater part of the movement. As without intermission the rising sixths of the second subject raise their repeated cries, persisting still in G minor, it becomes more than ever clear that the emotional conflict centres in the inescapable oppression of that pathetic key. The sixths widen to poignant ninths, and for a moment the spell seems to be broken by an effort which leaves violin and 'cello in unaccompanied dialogue. But a moment later the relentless repetition of the accompaniment closes in again. Nor has the gaining of B flat major brought more than qualified ease. Figures of the first theme recur with increasing persistence, and passionate accents remind us that G minor is very near at hand. At length the questioning arpeggio pauses for answer to the enquiry whether it shall return to retrace the whole of its unprofitable path as Mozart directs, and then extends the question as to what lies before. At once the long lines of the violins point descent to the dark region of E flat minor, and from now on the development (one of Mozart's finest inspirations, for all that it is short) is based entirely upon the second subject. The instruments over-reach one another in a succession of poignant minor ninths (compare the finale of the G minor

Symphony) until the increasing complexity is broken and solved upon a dominant pedal with magnificent effect.

The recapitulation brings a further development of the theme through the intrusion of the second violin upon the counter-statement. But the main problem is whether the second subject will succeed in raising itself to any small measure of new freedom, or capitulate to the traditional claims of a G minor to which it has already conceded so much. In the coda, for all the intensity of the first moment, neither subject has the strength left for further effort and each in turn quickly falls to pieces through sheer exhaustion.

The Minuet maintains the same anguished rise and fall of melody, though strength is added to its broken phrases by massive chords defiantly flung out of a breathless despair. Yet it is the tender, pathetic cadence and the nuance of its repetition which lives in the memory, to be transformed in a magic moment into the major key (Trio) with wonderful effect, bringing "some little joy" though it be tender and wistful.

In the E flat Adagio, the instruments are muted. The expectation of a simple harmonised melody is not realised, for the theme is a complex of several sections, at moments so tentative as to fall silent altogether. The contrasting secondary material brings both a quickening of the pulse and a darkening of the colours as the falling melodic lines of the violin reawaken the sense of tragedy, and although this is soon magically dispelled in the major variant which follows yet it is only at the very last that, in a brief coda, a sense of complete and untroubled happiness is felt.

The prolonged Adagio introduction to the finale (a unique occurrence in Mozart) is almost a movement in itself. Whatever hopes the preceding movement may have held out, we find that despair has but increased. Once again with quiet obstinacy the repeated notes return accompanied by a fatalistic ostinato motive in the bass, and amidst this scene the violin piteously and with impassioned phrases seeks alone for some escape. Suddenly we find that all obstruction has mysteriously vanished, and after a moment of hesitation all enter upon the newfound freedom with a rondo of unsullied happiness. Here the very themes of the earlier movements, the questioning arpeggio, the crying sixths, are utterly transformed. Rondos are apt to infect themselves so that even their subjects become little rondos before they have embarked upon their formal adventures. Here in addition Mozart inserts a subsidiary section of some size and importance before the first episode, recalling the Trio of the Minuet. The second episode (in C major) will be recognised by all who are familiar with the better known Pianoforte Concerto in A.

2. QUINTET IN E FLAT FOR HORN, VIOLIN, 2 VIOLAS AND VIOLONCELLO (K. 407)

Allegro
Andante
Allegro

Ignaz Leutgeb was obviously no mean horn player. He was principal horn in the Archbishop of Salzburg's private band and on their visit to Paris in 1770 was commended in the press for his performance as soloist at the Concert Spirituel. But what his spiritual makeup amounted to is rather hard to guess. When Mozart settled in Vienna in 1781 Leutgeb had set up in a suburb there as a cheesemonger, but continued to play. The two were good friends, which means that Mozart never lost an opportunity of teasing his friend unmercifully, as any one keen on enlarging his technique in leg pulling may care to read in Grove's grave dictionary. And if Leutgeb was rewarded by, amongst other things, four fine horn concertos, he has not only to stomach strongly humoured abuse, but even a manuscript written in five alternating coloured inks.

This fine quintet was written for him towards the end of 1782 just after the first (D major) concerto. Mozart referred to it as "das Leut-

gebische." His widow Constanze writing in 1800 to the publishers J. A. André of Offenbach mentions that Leutgeb has a copy of this 'quintet in Dis,' i.e. D sharp, which suggests that once again Mozart has sought to put the wind up his familiar butt with an alarming title for a comfortable E flat. Comfortable as a key maybe, but this quintet is in fact even more exacting on the horn technique than the concertos, and it is indeed a concertante piece; but Einstein goes too far when he proclaims that this is not really chamber music. Not only is the detail of interest constantly switching from one instrument to another in varied patterns of ensemble, but the colouring of the whole by the use of a second viola has a peculiar depth and richness.

INTERVAL

3. STRING QUINTET IN C MAJOR (K. 515)

Allegro

Menuetto: Allegretto

Andante

It has already been noted that the C major Quintet was completed barely a month before the G minor, in the Spring of 1787. I have my suspicions indeed that the two were on the stocks together and that it may only have been the resolution of the finale of the G minor that led to its not being completed first. As is not infrequent with closely paired works (witness some of the symphonies of Beethoven, or of Brahms), the two exhibit a complete polarisation of mood and even of style. There can be no doubt that, when presented together, the C major with its extraordinary spaciousness, its melodious optimism, its spiritual calm and veritable balm of benediction, must come as the aftermath to the soulsearching pathos of the other.

On opening the score one is mildly surprised to see it labelled Quintet No. 2 and immediately wonders, what then is No. 1. It is in fact an early essay of Salzburg days of no great consequence (K. 174 in B flat). More interesting is the fact that Mozart aimed at a set of three quintets at this time. Whether he at first envisaged that they could all be string quintets is not so clear, for surprisingly the G minor is composed on paper originally prepared for a clarinet quintet, and he produced no such work until two years later. But he did complete his trio of quintets by rescoring for strings (K. 406) the fine C minor work originally composed as a Serenade for Wind Octet (K. 388), and subscriptions for the three were invited by advertisement in April 1788. In the last year of his life Mozart composed two further great string quintets (D major and E flat major) which, as one cannot have all good things in one season, I hope may be in store for the delight of another year's concerts here. It is an interesting reflection for those who mistakenly believe that with all his divine gifts, Mozart never knew the experience of trial and error, that these last quintets again exhibit, not in themselves but in the off-products of sketch sheets, first attempts to compose quintets in these very keys which the composer abandoned as not rewarding.

But how rewarding this great C major Quintet is I propose to indicate in very few words. Spaciousness I have already remarked—such spaciousness as may well have inspired Schubert's double 'cello quintet—and this is the overriding feature of the first movement. The Minuet brings rich deep coils of winding thirds, whether low on the fiddles, or with viola and 'cello or on paired violas; the F major Trio section brings more yearning plaintive accents that yield to gaiety in the cadences. The F major Andante is at once one of Mozart's most profound visions of spiritual exaltation (at moments one seems to be with Sarastro "in diesen heiligen Hallen") and one of the greatest duos (for first viola and first violin) in the whole literature of music. The final Allegro is a rondo of Mozart's unique persuasion, of unullied joy, the fulfilment of delights glimpsed two years earlier in the C major Quartet (K. 465).

S.T.M.N.