

# EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY CONCERTS

1978-79

## THE EDINBURGH QUARTET

Miles Baster Peter Markham  
Michael Beeston Christopher Gough

*with*

PHILIP GREENE  
*clarinet*

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 23 November 1978

THE FIRST performance of Hans Gal's Clarinet Quintet, Op 107, is to be given on Thursday at Edinburgh University, where the 88-year-old composer was for many years a member of the music staff. It will be played by the Edinburgh Quartet and Philip Greene as centrepiece of a programme which will also include works by Haydn and Beethoven.

## THE ARTS

### Edinburgh: Hans Gal's clarinet quintet

By CONRAD WILSON

NO-ONE could accuse Hans Gal, at the age of 88, of resting on his laurels. Yesterday at Edinburgh University his latest work, a Clarinet Quintet which raises his list of opus numbers to 107, was performed by Philip Green and the Edinburgh Quartet in the composer's (and a large audience's) presence.

The first time I heard Dr Gal, some 25 years ago, he was giving a lecture on the clarinet, Mozart's lordly (and most eloquent) wind instrument. His own love for it shines through his new work, though not at the expense of the strings, which generate much delightful melodic activity in the first movement. Last night this opening allegro sounded as imperturbably flowing as anything he has written in recent years; but, though Viennese

neurosis may be missing from Dr Gal's music, that is not to say the slow movement was devoid of tension.

Most of the evening's tension, however, lay in Beethoven's F minor String Quartet, Op 95, some of it being an intrinsic part of the score, and some of it stemming from performance problems, particularly in the awkward trio of the scherzo. The best combination of musical tension and performing tension occurred in the opening movement, where the players conveyed the fury of the music in a way they did not quite match later.

To start the programme, there was an affectionate account of Haydn's E flat major Quartet, Op. 33, No. 2, with a specially pleasing, sensitive treatment of the largo.

HAYDN 1732-1809  
Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 33 No. 2

*Allegro moderato cantabile*  
Scherzo (*Allegro*): Trio  
*Largo sostenuto*  
Finale (*Presto*)

The second of Haydn's 'Russian' quartets shares many of the same preoccupations as its predecessor, the B minor quartet heard in these concerts some weeks ago, though the rather stark qualities of Haydn in B minor now give way to the genial warmth characteristic of his music in E-flat major. Once again motifs from the first two bars tend to dominate the first movement which embodies one of Haydn's most tightly knit development sections—a conversation piece which Goethe would have regarded as being in the truest quartet style.

The scherzo and the trio too (almost an Austrian *Ländler*) have a Mozartian flavour: could this movement have been in the younger composer's mind when he wrote the menuetto of K.428? But the last two movements are again pure Haydn, the *Largo* opening with a characteristic touch in its duo scoring for viola and cello and the *Presto*, after trying to turn into a tarantella, ending quite unable to remember more than a bar-and-a-half at a time of its main theme. It hiccups to a close, taking a deep breath and cheekily whispering the snatch of tune it first thought of with a 'if-you-want-any-more-you-can-play-it-yourself' air.

M.T.

HANS GAL b. 1890  
Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet (First performance)

*Allegro comodo*  
*Lento*  
*Poco adagio, leading to Allegro molto*

A homage to one of the composer's favourite instruments, this work was written last year, preceded by a String Quintet: both works results of an intense interest in the unlimited possibilities of a five part texture. The clarinet, treated as a protagonist with a vocal character of expressiveness, is both combined with and opposed by the four string instruments who are acting in turn as counter-soloists.

A lyrical first movement in sonata form is followed by a grave, elegiac *lento*, a kind of dirge, twice interrupted by a relaxed intermezzo. Following this, a slowish, pensive introduction—it will later find an occasion for returning as a contrasting episode—moves into a sportive rondo finale in the character of a *commedia dell' arte*, where the clarinet is acting the part of a buffoon, bringing the movement to a burlesque conclusion H.G.

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## INTERVAL

BEETHOVEN 1770-1827  
Quartet in F minor, Op. 95

*Allegro con brio*  
*Allegretto ma non troppo:*  
*Allegro assai vivace ma serio*  
*Larghetto—Allegretto agitato—Allegro*

The F minor quartet was written in 1810 immediately after the composer had completed the music to Goethe's 'Egmont'. The quartet shares not only the principal key of that music, but for the most part also its intense gravity, a feature which is reflected in Beethoven's own title—'Quartett serio'. Op. 95 represents a turning point in Beethoven's career. The broad expansiveness of the previous quartet, Op. 74, gives way to a style that is often terse and abrupt in melodic phraseology with those sudden changes of mood that were to become such a feature of his 'third period'.

The first movement shows Beethoven at his most concise. Conventional repetitions are done away with, and contrasting ideas are presented without transition so as to highlight their essential differences. The first subject is hurled forth without ceremony and its repetition reaches a savage *fortissimo* only to be displaced immediately by the tender mood of the second theme. But even this is allowed no room to expand and is roughly pushed aside by the semiquaver motif from the first bar. Only in the last few bars of the movement does this motif die away to *pianissimo* as though exhausted by the conflict which it has engendered.

In terms of sound alone the *Allegretto* is one of Beethoven's loveliest movements, but a pensive melancholy reigns over it, accentuated by the falling chromatic progressions of the fugue subject. The scherzo follows without a break, grim and sardonic, but twice relieved by a trio section treated in the manner of a chorale. After a brief slow introduction, the finale proceeds in a lilting six-eight rhythm that is undeniably Mendelssohnian in flavour though this could hardly be said of the final touch: a racy *Allegro* in F major, the apparent frivolity of which has disturbed many commentators though it is a typical product of the wayward streak which was an essential part of Beethoven's musical personality.

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