

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1954-55

First Concert

THE NEW
EDINBURGH QUARTET

ROBERT COOPER

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

ANNE CROWDEN

JOAN DICKSON

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 28TH OCTOBER, 1954

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME : ONE SHILLING

PROGRAMME

QUARTET IN G, Op. 76, No. 1

Haydn
(1732-1809)

Allegro con spirito
Adagio sostenuto
Minuet : Presto
Allegro ma non troppo

More than one writer has found that however much he may have to say about Haydn's earlier quartets he has to confess that, apart from one or two minor points calling for observation, the six quartets of Opus 76 (composed in 1798-99) "are beyond description." Confronted with a second childhood trailing its own clouds of innocent glories, yet imbued with the depth of heart and wisdom of age, I can but do as they have done and tread lightly amidst the profound transparencies of this inimitable art. One forgets which Haydn quartet has earned a sobriquet for politeness from some earnest German enthusiast, but certainly no politer compliment was paid by viola to violoncello than that with which this opening movement is addressed. Yet how much it is to discover to us beyond the formalities of etiquette!

The Presto minuet already has the drive of a miniature Beethoven scherzo, though its trio section hangs attentively upon the neat virtuosity of the first fiddle. The Finale in the *minor* key turns to a sterner mood, perhaps a little querulously poised on the brink of gaiety. Eventually it is restored to the airy sunshine of G major. For Cobbett the final bars suggested "the joyous close of an operatic number—in the Papageno vein." Without doubt it comes from that magic land of delight in which Papageno forgot forever the tribulations of his brief sojourn in the land of Egypt.

QUARTET IN F MINOR (Op. 95)

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

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

Between 1806, when the three Rasoumovsky quartets were composed, and 1824, when the first of the late quartets (Op. 127 in E flat) was completed, Beethoven wrote only two string quartets—the so-called "Harp" (Op. 74) and this in F minor. Despite the

disparity of opus numbers (which indicate only dates of publication) these belong to 1809 and 1810 respectively.

The F minor quartet reveals a sequence of moods whose close relationship is easily appreciated, with one important exception. The alternate savage bitterness and relenting gentleness of the first movement; the tenderness that is sustained throughout the second, with a tinge of self pity; the despairing complaint of the third arising out of this, which is transformed into rugged determination gloriously eased by the Schubertian comforting of its lyrical trio sections; lastly the inescapable melancholy of the final movement—what solution is there to this intense and almost morbid melancholy? In the "Dichterliebe" the poet finds some escape in laboured humour and the extravagant paraphernalia for sinking his grief. But here the whole cluster of related emotions slip away, and the only one that survives is the exhilaration of sheer freedom. Thus this most intense and concentrated work at the very last in ecstasy takes flight from all the toils of its labouring heart.

QUARTET IN D

César Franck
(1822-1890)

Poco lento—Allegro
Scherzo : Vivace
Larghetto
Finale : Allegro

César Franck, having been for the greater part of his life anything but a prolific composer and one whose lesser attainments fell astonishingly far short of his greater, suddenly blossomed out in his middle fifties and produced in the last fifteen years of his life such a wealth of masterpieces as would be remarkable even from a prolific composer. He had to suffer from adverse critics and from jealousy, and it was not until the first performance of this, his only quartet, composed a year before his death, that he received any really encouraging response from the public.

Those who are familiar with others of Franck's compositions will expect to find the movements of the quartet thematically linked together by what is termed the "cyclic" method. Franck sought to unify his works by the eventual combination of various themes, and also to some extent by developing two or more of them from a single germinal idea.

To review in the finale the material of earlier movements and to reject each in turn in favour of a new theme was hardly an original idea! Franck had to work for much of his material as did Beethoven, by sketching and re-working and once again re-working. And more interesting by far than the staged drama of the rejection

of themes in the finale is his quiet rejection of the first sketch of the opening of the first movement, and similarly of the second sketch, until he had perfected what is amongst the most sublime openings in all music. The finale, perhaps, is not entirely satisfactory. A musical theme is not necessarily *persona grata* because it happens to have an illustrious and ever welcome father. Nor is transformation necessarily a process of any value in itself. It is difficult not to feel that the theme adopted for the finale is rather more a weakening than a transformation of the great initial theme from which it is derived. The finale, in fact, owes almost all its strength to the vigorous motive of rejection.

The first movement is built up of two great forms so intermingled as to be complementary to one another, the Lied or Song of the opening, and the quick movement in the Sonata form, whose theme had already sounded in the cadence of the former. The Lied is heard again at the mid-point of the Sonata movement as a fugue in the minor key, which eventually dissolves into the development, and again at the end of the movement, very quietly played as a divine song of peace. A circling motive, first heard upon the 'cello, plays an important subsidiary part in this movement and a more decisive part in the finale.

The Scherzo throws the lightest scuds of nimble string staccatos back and forth across the stage ; these broken figures soon settle into a swinging melody, only for this to fade again beneath wisps of gossamer. The more thoughtful melody of the trio is heard later in altered form, as a passionate contrasting theme to that of the slow movement. This latter is a Lied in B major, richly harmonised and bringing with it a wealth of subsidiary themes. It is heard at full length three times, the last two statements being separated by the passionate climax of the trio theme just mentioned.

The plan of the finale is too complex to set out at length. The vigorous theme of rejection provides its chief motive power. To crown the great transformation scene which constitutes the greater part of the movement, the figures of the scherzo prepare the way for a passionate repetition of the great Lied of the slow movement.

S.T.M.N.