

MUSIC
EDINBURGH QUARTET

QUEEN'S HALL, EDINBURGH

★★★★

A GUEST member joined the Edinburgh Quartet for the start of its new season in the Queen's Hall, with Gordon Bragg standing in for regular second violinist Philip Burrin. But we needn't have worried about any lack of cohesion: the evening's performances were vivid and fresh, and the programme bold, full of contrasts, and expertly delivered.

Bragg was an able partner for first violinist Tristan Gurney in the Haydn Quartet in B minor, op 33 no 1, which was an ideal opener – brief and to the point, and given an unfussy performance that favoured elegance and clarity. The foursome shaped the graceful slow movement beautifully, and their finale was full of impetuous energy.

Their closing piece, Mendelssohn's F minor Quartet,

op 80, is a million miles away from the composer's otherwise genial, cheerful music, an almost unremittingly dark work written immediately after the death of his beloved sister Fanny. The Edinburgh players' reading was brimming over with energy and intensity right from its stormy opening tremolos, yet they were wise to bring some subtle light and shade to this turbulent music.

The highlight of the evening, though, was the Britten Second Quartet, the first of the Edinburgh foursome's tributes to the composer in his centenary year. It was a searing, sharply etched performance, from the perfumed lyricism of the first movement through to the inexorable repetitions of the closing *Chacony*, over which the ghost of Henry Purcell hovered benignly. By the piece's grand and sonorous concluding chords, the players had ensured that their performance would live long in the memory.

DAVID KETTLE