



Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: String Quintets in A major (Op. 18 No. 1) & in B flat major (Op. 87 No. 2) & Four Pieces for String Quartet (Op. 81)

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Gramophone (Caroline Gill - 01.09.2014)

GRAMOPHONE

This is the final volume in the Mandelring Quartet's complete survey of Mendelssohn's chamber music for strings, and as its predecessors have proved themselves to be the first elements of a cycle that would be definitive once complete, the stakes are particularly high for this concluding volume.

It doesn't disappoint, with the contrast in outlook and maturity between the early works and their more adult examples as happily apparent as ever in the difference in character and youthful buoyancy they bring out in each. The phrasing, particularly in the slow movements, may be sinuous and sustained but the articulation remains adequately spartan to allow the music to shine through as the art it was, rather than the purely cerebral achievements of a prodigy testing out his new-found skills. It drives Mendelssohn's enthralling musical ideas with the kind of conviction that makes it difficult to turn off this disc without listening from beginning to end. It is recorded with their customary clarity, too, which adds an extra dimension to their performance, particularly in the last two movements of the Four Pieces: in the more muscular passages of the Fugue, where Mendelssohn uses its subject in repeatedly different and increasingly outlandish scenarios, and in the spontaneity of the two contrasting sections of the Capriccio.

Everything the Mandelrings have to throw at these pieces shows them to their best advantage - fleet-footed bowing, tongue-in-groove intonation and ensemble, and a sense of momentum that always drives the music in the right direction. The definitive set is complete.