



F. Schubert: String Quartets Vol. I

aud 92.507

EAN: 4022143925077



www.SA-CD.net (Polly Nomial - 2008.06.17)

This disc has been a long time coming, both in respect of being the first account of Death and the Maiden to grace SACD in its original quartet form and also in the fact that this was recorded (in MCH) during March 2003 but originally released on RBCD only - now it is available as it was intended to be heard, in glorious surround sound.

Opening their cycle, the Mandelring Quartett play what is one of the most famous and greatest of all the quartet repertoire. Throughout their playing style is Romantic, owing little to HIP influences. So, the opening movement becomes almost Mahlerian in intensity, vividly pointing the way to the many symphonic funeral marches. The Andante con moto, where the song "Der Tod und das Mädchen" provides the basis for a superb set of variations, is painfully beautiful and lyrical; even the 'hunting' variation sounds anguished in the hands of the Mandelring Quartett. The Scherzo is again given a high voltage account with the Trio providing a deceptive few moments of emotional repose. Taken at a relatively relaxed Presto, the Finale is as turbulent and neurotic as one could hope. The one other criticism some listeners may have is that the Mandelring Quartett apply a broad rubato to this movement (before it is almost within each phrase); about 100 bars before the final coda, there is an audible acceleration which just prevents the account from entering the realms of greatness. This aside, the playing is phenomenal - just as passionate as the Lindsay Quartet can be but with the precision of attack and tuning one would expect from those schooled by Julia Fischer's teacher and members of the Berliner's. Other accounts will surely come along but the bar has been raised very high indeed - my final reflections were that it was like listening to the fiery passion of the Busch Quartet but with all players being equally fine, making an equal contribution and also without any of the rhythmical instability that is observable on the Busch's extant Schubert recordings. For those that want a modern but decidedly non-HIP approach, there will be few finer accounts available but not everyone will warm to such high powered playing.

Following the Death and the Maiden is almost impossible and the Mandelring players wisely pair this quartet with Schubert's 10th essay in the medium - almost unbelievable given the lowly Deutsch number! This is a very different style of writing and the Mandelring give a far more measured level of voltage to their playing - it is if they have one eye on the past (of Haydn and Mozart) rather than the future. None of the music is terrifically memorable but it is unlikely that many accounts will be presented of this work, still less with such fine playing.

The sound is wonderful - preserving the very beautiful, some might say almost perversely so, tone of the Mandelring Quartett. What is especially pleasing is the sense of placing of instrument, clearly identifiable in a way normally denied to the listener in all but the concert hall. This allows the interplay and all the crucial

counter-melodies (so crucial in D810) to be heard without effort.

Highly recommended.

