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The RIAS Amadeus Quartet Recordings - Romanticism

aud 21.425

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The fifth volume in Audite's superbly refurbished boxed series covers a two-decade period from 1950-69 during which time the Amadeus Quartet set down numerous broadcast recordings at the Siemensvilla studios of RIAS. The fifth volume covers the Romantic period – from Mendelssohn and Schumann to Brahms, Bruckner, Grieg, Verdi and Dvořák. The great value – one of many, but the principal one nonetheless – is that several of the works are new to the quartet's discography.

The first three CDs are largely given over to Brahms. In the case of the C minor Quartet, Op. 51 No. 1 the recording is slightly shrill in the strings' upper register – this is something that is noticeable in a number of these earliest incarnations – though not enough to limit one's enjoyment of the performances. What one may lose in this acidic quality is more than made up when the playing is so vitalised and dramatically purposeful. The tonal breadth of the Romanze survives any possible aural impediment. It's the quality of refinement that demarcates the Op. 67 Quartet where one finds Norbert Brainin's beautiful phrasing in the Andante one of the most distinguishing markers of excellence. The 1957 recording quality is decidedly warmer, aerating the ensemble's textures to considerable advantage. A couple of days after the Op. 51 No. 1 performance the quartet returned to the radio studio to play the Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 34 but not with one of their familiar colleagues, Clifford Curzon, but instead with Conrad Hansen. He is perfectly in tune with the conception, his own contribution being eminently well-balanced: playing of strong identity but selfless integration. Note his pizzicato-like paragraphs in the first movement, and the scaled question-and-response between the strings and piano, as well as the expressive inner voicings in the slow movement and the Scherzo's sweep. In the beautifully phrased Clarinet Quintet, chronologically the last work in the box to have been composed, the Amadeus is joined by Heinrich Geuser. A distinguished orchestral principal, teacher and soloist he had a considerable influence on the succeeding generation of clarinets, one of whom – Karl Leister, the most famous German player of his generation – was later to record the Clarinet Quintet with the Amadeus.

For the String Quintet, Op. 111 they are joined by their violist of choice, Cecil Aronowitz, for a September 1953 performance of vivid communicative power where the rhythmic pointing in the finale is as persuasive as the elements of rusticity embedded in the music. The Bruckner Quartet is sonorously declaimed but they manage to locate the wit in the Scherzo that prefaces the sustained gravity of the Adagio. Though they performed Schumann's chamber music in concert and for radio broadcast they never took any of the music into the studio, which makes the

appearance of the Op.44 Piano Quintet and the A major Quartet, Op. 41 No. 3 so exciting. The former is again with Hansen in a performance dating from February 1962 notable for the flowing lyricism of the second movement and in the sensitive balance maintained in the finale. The A major's fugal and rustic predilections are happily brought out, the country dance that courses through the finale being a particularly good example of the Amadeus' art. The recording quality is generous enough to make the quartet sound more characteristically themselves here than in some of the earliest readings. Even in a box this fine, disc four is therefore particularly valuable for reasons of repertoire and interpretation.

But then so too are the final discs. The Amadeus never recorded Mendelssohn's E flat major – listen to the lavishly applied tone in the Beethoven-inspired slow opening section of the first movement – but they certainly don't stint the expressive intensity of the slow movement. They did record the Capriccio from the Op. 81 Quartet as a stand-alone, and reprise that here. Perhaps surprisingly they'd had the Verdi Quartet in their repertoire right from their 1948 Wigmore Hall debut so by November 1962 it had been under their fingers for a decade-and-a-half. They'd learnt to mitigate any inherent problems in the writing whilst remaining excitingly earthy in the Prestissimo third movement. It's perhaps strange too to realise that they left behind only a single Dvořák work – inevitably, the American quartet – so the A major Piano Quintet, Op. 81 is another item new to their now-expanding discography. Hansen is again good in this 1950 reading – one can draw parallels between this interpretation and that of Curzon and the Vienna Philharmonic Quartet at around the same time, as well as on the wing with the Budapest Quartet. The Amadeus drive when required though their rhythms aren't quite as pungent as the best Czech ensembles. Finally, there is yet another newbie, the Grieg Quartet. If your standard is the impossibly high pre-war 78rpm set by the Budapest, then you will find the Amadeus not too far behind in matters of tonal breadth. It's a stylish reading and very communicatively presented.

The six CDs in this box offer great rewards for the Amadeus collector. The items new to their work list are clearly of the greatest interest and it's doubly valuable that the performances of these are no less compelling than the companion works. It's also good to hear from their collaborative artists – Aronowitz, the only violist they performed with, the great clarinetist Geuser and, of course, Hansen who makes a consistently fine impression. The original broadcast tapes have been outstandingly well realised: they're all mono with the single exception of the Mendelssohn Op. 12. In short, exemplary presentation, and a richly valuable box.

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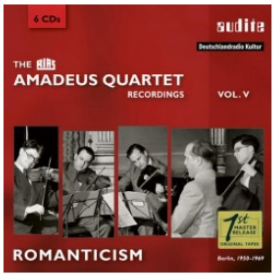
The RIAS Amadeus Quartet Recordings – Volume 5: Romanticism
Amadeus String Quartet
Cecil Aaronowitz (viola II): Heinrich Geuser (clarinet): Conrad Hansen (piano)
rec. 1950-69, Siemensvilla, Berlin-Lankwitz
Mono tapes except Mendelssohn, Op.12
AUDITE 21.425 [6 CDs: 375:21]



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Contents
Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)
String Quartet in C Minor, Op. 51/1 [30:52]
String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 67 [32:12]
Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34 [36:11]
Clarinet Quintet in B Minor, Op. 115 [33:48]
String Quintet in G Major, Op. 111 [24:48]
Anton BRUCKNER (1824-1896)
String Quintet in F Major, WAB 112 [41:33]
Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)
Piano Quintet in E-flat Major, Op. 44 [29:30]
String Quartet in A Major, Op. 41/3 [28:27]
Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)
String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 12 [23:00]
String Quartet, Op. 81: III Capriccio [5:37]
Giuseppe VERDI (1813-1901)
String Quartet in E Minor [22:53]
Antonín DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)
Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 81 [34:19]
Edvard GRIEG (1843-1907)
String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 27 [32:31]

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