



Quartetto Italiano - The complete RIAS Recordings

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Another brilliant musical document from post-war Berlin

Quartetto Italiano: The Complete RIAS Recordings

The Quartetto Italiano was the first of the new post-war groups that inaugurated a new golden age of String Quartets: the Quartetto Italiano was formed in 1945, the Juilliard String Quartet and LaSalle Quartet in 1946, and the Janáček and Amadeus quartets in 1947. Audite here brings us three CDs worth of fabulous recordings for RIAS ("Radio in the American Sector" of Berlin). The RIAS studios were excellent, and their engineers highly accomplished, so we have (as with the Amadeus Quartet album I reviewed late last year) an excellent idea of how these musicians sounded, in this case between 1951 to 1963. The group's repertoire is interesting, especially considering the period: Donizetti, Malipiero and Cherubini provide an Italian antipasto, if I may be permitted a metaphor (pun!) in questionable taste (taste!). Their 1959 Ravel interpretation is searching, and sometimes fierce; maybe even more so than their late recordings of core repertoire. This is a standout performance, though it's perhaps less than Gallic. The early String Quartet no. 8 by Schubert, from 1963, has the characteristic QI sound of their studio recordings of the Viennese masters: it's taut and tight and intense, eschewing sentimentality and emphasizing structure over story-telling. The first of the Haydn String Quartets op. 77 is the earliest recording here, from 1951. It's sunnier and more fun (to listen to, and I expect, to play) than the more disciplined Haydn the Quartetto Italiano developed later in their recording career. These recordings are at a higher level in both sonics and interpretation than your average historic releases, and the excellent documentation and the fact that a number of the works have never been released, make this a must-listen for chamber music fans.



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