



String Quartets by Brahms (Op. 51, No. 2) & Dessoff (Op. 7)

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The German conductor and composer Felix Otto Dessoff (1835-1892) was born in Leipzig, where he studied composition (with Moritz Hauptmann and Julius Rietz), piano (with Ignaz Moscheles) and conducting. By age of nineteen, he was a theatre director in Düsseldorf and five years later was offered a guest position with the Vienna Court Opera. In Vienna, he became friends with Johannes Brahms and later was to premiere several of the great composer's orchestral works, including his Symphony No. 1 in 1876. Although he had wrote music during the 1850s and early 1860s, Dessoff gave up composing when his career as a conductor blossomed and he made a name for himself as director of the Frankfurt Opera House. His close friendship with Brahms can be seen in an exchange of letters between the two in 1878 when Dessoff wished to dedicate his best known work, his String Quartet Op. 7 in F. Though it met with success in its premiere, Dessoff was still not sure it was worth publishing and sent the score to Brahms asking for his candid opinion and offering to dedicate to him. Brahms wrote back praising the work and said, '...you would do me a great honour by writing my name over the quartet title - if need be then, we'll take the blows together should the public find it not to their liking.' The quartet contains rhythmic, harmonic and performing idiosyncrasies reminiscent of Brahms in places; it is full of wit and playful joy, convincing the listener through its original, direct charm. The work is exuberantly performed on this third CD of the series 'Brahms and his Contemporaries' by the acclaimed Mandelring Quartett, together with Brahms's innovative string quartet in A minor (Op. 51, No. 2).