



The RIAS Amadeus Quartet Beethoven Recordings

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Gramophone (Rob Cowan - 2013.09.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Old friends revisited

Just as numerous readers will have learned the greatest of all symphony cycles through one or other of Bruno Walter's recordings, the Amadeus Quartet will have served a similar purpose for the greatest of all string quartet cycles. For me, and I'm sure for many, the Amadeus Quartet's DG set from the early Sixties remains more or less de rigueur, but now Audite has come up with a credible supplement, except that there's no Harp Quartet (Op. 74) and the version included of Op. 127 dates from some five years later than the last of the others, by which time lead violinist Norbert Brainin's vibrato was beginning to widen (though his intonation remained true). The remainder of the set was taped by RIAS ('Radio in the American Sector'), between 1950 and 1962.

I was delighted to revisit this wonderful music as presented by expert guides who over the years I have grown to love and respect. One or two differences are worth noting. For example, the development section of Op. 18 No. 2's opening movement is more emphatically played than on the DG recording and the heavenly 'Heiliger Dankgesang' slow movement from Op. 132 is both marginally broader and darker-hued than on the DG alternative. Time and again one senses that the radio recordings capture an extra degree of spontaneity, in the 'middle' quartets especially, which, while in essence almost identical as interpretations to their commercially released alternatives, show greater eagerness when approaching key climaxes. There's a significant bonus by way of a memorable 1957 recording of the Op. 29 C major String Quintet, with Cecil Aronowitz playing second viola. This is the first volume in a series of six projected to cover, in addition to Beethoven, Schubert, Mozart, 'Modernism', Haydn and 'Romanticism'. We are in for a series of treats.