Dmitri Shostakovich: Complete String Quartets Vol. IV

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Like all the volumes in the series, the Audite recording features a ballerina on the cover – the same ballerina on each, making them hard to tell apart – but that's the only aspect of this latest album that isn't true to the quality of the music. Jens F. Laursen thought the previous, third, volume of the series a treasure – review – and that's no less true of the recent release. These performances bring out the power of the music and also its more beautiful aspects – like the late Beethoven quartets, this is quirky and unpredictable music which places considerable demands on the performers to capture its restless temperament. The recording, especially in 24-bit format, albeit that it's only 24/44.1, sounds very fine. I haven't heard the surround-sound version.

I'm surprised to see that the identical coupling on Hyperion, highly and justly praised when first released, is now available only as a download and to special order on CD from the Archive Service. The Petersburg Quartet, too, capture the beauty and intensity of the music. I echoed Neil Horner's praise of these performers in Nos. 11, 13 and 15 (CDA67157 – January 2011) and that holds good for this volume. With identical programmes, honours are about even between this and the Audite – the Hyperion comes with a pdf booklet and the lossless flac, usually £7.99, is discounted to £6 as I write, but the Audite is additionally available in 24-bit and surround sound.

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