



Ludwig van Beethoven: Complete String Quartets

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Gramophone (Rob Cowan - 2018.10.18)

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Surveying the stakes of intelligent and insightful Beethoven string quartet cycles by gifted young players finds us with a plethora of recommendable choices, sets either completed or in the making by the likes of the Artemis, Casals, Elias, Belcea and Alcan Quartets and the immensely personable Quartetto di Cremona, whose consistently alert interpretations also enjoy the benefit of remarkably lifelike SACD sound. This or that significant textual detail might hold sway for some collectors whereas, in terms of interpretation, the Quartetto di Cremona parade a keen edge, with generally swift pacing, tension within rests and a wide range of instrumental colours. The opening Allegro of Op 18 No 5 has a bright, chirpy feel to it, whereas the parallel movement in No 6 really is a bustling con brio, which means that the music's implied conversational opera buffa element takes a back seat. Op 95 opens to an Allegro that's all but maniacal in its urgency, whereas Op 135's Scherzo bounces along, a breezy preparation for an expressive but mobile account of the Lento slow movement. I was fascinated by the Cremona's unusual voicing of Op 130's Alla danza tedesca but a little disappointed that the Cavatina is tailed by the allegro-finale 'rewrite' rather than by the gnarled Grosse Fuge (which, incidentally, is magnificently played: you can find it on disc 3). Still, this is without question a set to reckon with. Even with the Takács Quartet (Decca) as overall leaders in the digital field I'd strongly recommend it, especially given the comparatively unfamiliar String Quintet (with the Emerson's Lawrence Dutton as the extra viola player) as a welcome bonus, another engaging performance. [...]