



Ludwig van Beethoven: Complete String Quartets

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The Quartetto di Cremona's ongoing Beethoven cycle has particularly impressed me for its visceral excitement and pulsating energy. Technical demands hold no terrors for this ensemble which dispatches the Fugal Finale to Op. 59 No. 3, taken here at breakneck speed, with dazzling clarity if not quite the elfin dexterity of the Takács Quartet on Decca. No less admirable is the seamless manner in which three of the instruments connect to a single line melodic sequence of semiquavers in the preceding Minuet.

Another strength is their consummate mastery of soft mysterious playing, experienced here to best advantage in the unexpectedly veiled sounds they conjure up just before the recapitulation to the first movement of Op. 18 No. 2, or in the harmonically radical slow introduction to Op. 59 No. 3, where they manage to stretch tension and uncertainty to almost breaking point before the exuberant release of an unequivocal C major tonality in the ensuing Allegro vivace.

Yet for all their undoubted qualities, these performances miss certain ingredients that are also central to Beethoven's musical make-up, in particular charm and humour. The outer movements of Op. 18 No. 2 are a good case in point. In the opening Allegro, for example, the Quartetto di Cremona convincingly projects the sudden explosive fortes, but the principal melodic lines seem somewhat devoid of grace and elegance. Likewise, for all its brilliance of execution, the performers underplay the sheer impudence with which Beethoven changes to distant keys in the skittish Finale. In general, therefore, the more expansive Op. 59 No. 3 is better suited to the Quartetto di Cremona's approach.



BEETHOVEN

Complete String Quartets, Vol. 7:
String Quartet No. 2 in G, Op. 18/2;
String Quartet No. 9 in C, Op. 59/3
Quartetto di Cremona
Audite 92.689 (hybrid CD/SACD)
56:05 mins

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RECORDING

★★★
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