



The RIAS Amadeus Quartet Recordings - Modernism

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Gramophone (Rob Cowan - 2015.07.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Amadeus disc premieres

One of my fondest concert memories from the late 1960s is of hearing the Amadeus Quartet in recital at a north London school playing Bartok's Fourth Quartet, a work that on first acquaintance thrilled me to the core, though my first record of the work – a very different sort of performance – was by the original Fine Arts Quartet (Saga LP, Music & Arts CD). Sadly the Amadeus never recorded a Bartok cycle so the appearance in the fourth volume of Audite's collection of the quartet's 'RIAS recordings' of the Fourth and Sixth Quartets, both recorded a good decade before I saw that Hampstead performance, is particularly valuable.

The second CD opens with Matyas Seiber's Third Quartet, Quartetto lirico, which is noticeably influenced by Bartok, the Sixth Quartet especially, and the Amadeus play it marvellously well. The opening minute or so of Bartok's Fourth sounds a little uncertain: the pizzicato Scherzo is rather measured and the wildcat finale lacks the sort of animal vigour that the Juilliards, the Veghs and indeed the Fine Arts brought to it. The performance's highlight is Martin Lovett's passionately rhapsodic cello solo in the slow third movement. The Sixth's first movement is at times rhythmically ambiguous, as if the players were just a few short steps short of mastering its form, whereas they're nearer the target in the dry, even OTT humour that fills the two middle movements. Best by far is the closing Mesto, music filled with profound sadness, a sadness that the quartet members, or the three of them who had been exiled from Europe, will have felt as deeply as the composer himself. Ironically it's the all-British first disc that finds them truly in their element, the Second Quartets of Britten and Tippett, music they seem to connect with intuitively. Both performances are memorably expressive.