



Johannes Brahms: Complete String Sextets

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Gramophone (Andrew Farach-Colton - 2017.09.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Hot on the heels of the superb Erato recording with the Capucon brothers et al comes this energetic account of Brahms's two sextets by the expanded Mandelring Quartet. With their wide-eyed exuberance, the Mandelring remind us that these are youthful masterworks. Only in the opening movement of the First Sextet do they push too hard; there's not much *ma non troppo* in this Allegro. Then, at bar 43 (1'03"), Brahms writes *tranquillo*, more as an expressive instruction than a tempo-change. The Mandelring don't pay heed to this marking; but a few pages later, at bar 85 (2'09"), with a similarly notated *animato*, they lurch into an even higher gear.

That said, there's a fervour to these performances that's quite special – and the remaining tempo choices, while nearly always on the brisk side, are ultimately convincing. Technically, the playing is exceptional in its tonal beauty and purity of intonation. Listen to cellist Bernhard Schmidt's glorious, singing sound at 1'57" in the finale of the First Sextet, and then to the glistening tone and spot-on tuning of violinist Sebastian Schmidt in the exposed, high-lying passage at 5'58". This refinement coupled with clean articulation helps clarify thick textures, and the often intricate instrumental interplay is managed seamlessly. The themes in the finale of the Second Sextet are juggled so deftly and with such lyrical abandon as to induce a joyous adrenaline rush. This intensity has as much to do with expressive warmth and attention to detail as it does with panache and polish – note, for example, those little, heart-tugging mordents that ornament the main melody in the Scherzo of Op 36.

I wouldn't want to be without the Erato disc, as the Capucon-led interpretations get straight to the heart of these *gemütlich* scores. But this exquisitely engineered Audite recording offers a fresh perspective that, in terms of musicianship and execution, comes very close to perfection.

Brahms
String Sextets - No 1, Op 18; No 2, Op 36
Mandelring Quartet with Roland Glassl &
Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt &
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Andrew Farach-Colton
Selected comparison:
R & G Capucon et al (6/17) (ERAT) 9029 58883-7

Brahms

String Sextets - No 1, Op 18; No 2, Op 36

Mandelring Quartet with Roland Glassl *va*

Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt *vc*

Audite © AUDITE97 715 (72' • DDD)



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et al comes this energetic account of Brahms's two sextets by the expanded Mandelring Quartet. With their wide-eyed exuberance, the Mandelring remind us that these are youthful masterworks. Only in the opening movement of the First Sextet do they push too hard; there's not much *ma non troppo* in this *Allegro*. Then, at bar 43 (1'03"), Brahms writes *tranquillo*, more as an expressive instruction than a tempo-change. The Mandelring don't pay heed to this marking; but a few pages later, at bar 85 (2'09"), with a similarly notated *animato*, they lurch into an even higher gear.

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