Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Complete String Trios

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Mozart's Record Guide

Mozart's Divertimento K 563 is widely regarded as the finest string trio ever written. It is in 6 movements rather than the usual 4, and the title is Divertimento, but don't let those aspects of the work turn you off to it; it is not a mere diversion. It has some of Mozart's loveliest writing for strings. It is also one of his longest chamber works, clocking in at threequarters of an hour. I assure you that Mozart didn't pad the material to fill time, either. Every note counts. Jacques Thibaud String Trio was founded in 1994 at the Arts University in Berlin. Their current membership is violinist Burkhard Mais, violist Hannah Strijbos, and cellist Bogdan Jianu. They play well together and perform this work with more taste and sense of proportion than some other groups I've heard. I can recommend this performance, but they are up against stiff competition. Isaac Stern, Pinchas Zukerman, and Leonard Rose made a very fine recording in 1975. Gidon Kremer, Kim Kashkashian, and Yo-Yo Ma made a wonderful recording in 1985. That is my favorite. It is exquisitely polished yet very soulful. The musicians really sing and produce ravishing sounds (unusual for the perpetual enfant-terrible Kremer). The classic recording is by Jascha Heifetz, William Primrose, and Emanuel Feuermann from 1941. It shows its age, yet it is the most brilliant ever made. Some may not like it because of the exhibitionism of the players, all of whom were the greatest virtuosos of their age, but I like hearing such assured playing where all technical obstacles are surmounted with effortless aplomb and panache. The works I had never heard before are the 5 Preludes and Fugues. Except for the first three Preludes, all of the material was arranged from music of Bach. They are pleasant to listen to, but not masterpieces, and the three Preludes composed by Mozart don't sound quite right coming before the more severe music of Bach.

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