

BEETHOVEN String Quartets in C minor op.18 no.4, in F major op.59 no.1 (Rasumovsky) & in C sharp minor op.131

Juilliard Quartet

Medici Arts 2072348 (www.medici.tv)



The Juilliard Quartet seems to have been with us always. When the performances on this DVD were recorded in 1975, the group had already existed for 30 years and had achieved a surety and authority of playing that comes with the wisdom of age. Visually, the DVD is simple: the four sit on a rostrum in the beautiful Baroque Bibliotheksaal in Polling, Bavaria, with its white walls,

columns and paintings, and the cameras look on from various angles without being annoying.

Musically it is a multi-faceted joy. The maturity in this playing manifests itself in an almost matter-of-fact manner, not through any lack of involvement, but in a feeling that this music has been internalised and understood to the extent that there is no need to embellish its surfaces. It can certainly be vivid. The C minor Quartet op.18 no.4 is powerful and dramatic, and the players keep it moving – the second and third movements have great drive to them – but they keep their powder dry for the moments when a touch of extra colour will be most telling.

There is drama in the C sharp minor Quartet op.131 – the players emphasise the sforzandos in the opening fugue more than many groups do, but contain them within a prevailing serenity. Their tempo in the Adagio molto e mesto of the F major Quartet op.59 no.1 is perfectly judged, allowing it both momentum and a sense of timeless contemplation. Indeed, this is all-perfectly judged, and in the spacious acoustic of the Bibliotheksaal it sounds wonderful. **TIM HOMFRAY**



Classic performances of Beethoven from the Juilliard Quartet

VIDOR NAGY IN CONCERT – KÜNSTLERPORTRAIT

Works by Eccles, Schubert, Milhaud, Kodály, Kurtág, Bartók, Bach, Paganini, Brunetti, Clarke, Hindemith, Falla, Brahms & Mahler

Vidor Nagy (viola) Günther Schmidt (piano)

Martina Schrott (harp) Baldur Pollich (guitar)

Württemberg State Orchestra Stuttgart, Dennis Russell Davies (conductor) Gabriele Ferro (conductor)

Edition Hera HERA 02201 (2 DVDs) (www.editionhera.de)



Should violist Vidor Nagy decide to retire from active service in the near future (he turned 66 this year), this collection of video recordings, totalling three and a half hours, would nicely round off his career. These tapes were originally made privately for the artist at concerts between 1982 and 1999, and – for all the care that has gone into their remastering – the video quality is accordingly variable, with more

than a whiff of the 'home video'.

To get the worst out of the way first, in most of the 1989 recital the sound is fractionally ahead of the image, to maddening effect in the Clarke and Hindemith sonatas. For some reason, the Brunetti Sonata is exempt from this problem. This work is a beautiful opener, as is the Eccles G minor Sonata in the 1992 recital. Nagy's programmes are traditional in form (Baroque starter, Romantic sonata, shorter virtuoso pieces at the end) but adventurous in content. In this 1992 concert, we find a homage to Nagy's Hungarian homeland, with works by Kodály (Adagio), Kurtág (*Signs* op.5) and Bartók (Nagy's own arrangement for viola of the First Rhapsody, otherwise played on violin or cello).

With the Württemberg State Orchestra, of which he was principal viola for 30 years, Nagy was one of the first to perform Paganini's *Sonata per la grand' viola* back in 1982. I was present at that concert (part of that year's International Viola Congress), and it has been a great pleasure to hear that pioneering performance again. I had forgotten that Nagy, taking advantage of the presence of a guitar player in the orchestra, had offered the Recitative and Adagio cantabile from Paganini's Quartet no.15 as an encore, but this is also included on the DVD.

From 1996 comes a hot-blooded performance of Bartók's posthumous Viola Concerto with the same orchestra, showing Nagy in best shape in a fiery interpretation. The apt encore here is the slow movement from Hindemith's unaccompanied Sonata op.25 no.1. Nagy has made studio recordings of much of this repertoire following the performances preserved here. Those CDs are arguably more polished, and the interpretations have been lived with longer. However, it is fascinating to have these unedited performances, live in every sense of the word. Precious little allowances need to be made, since technical mishaps are almost non-existent, and Nagy's economical playing, with no unnecessary frills, is in itself a pleasure to watch.

CARLOS MARÍA SOLARE