Franz Schubert: String Quartets Vol. II

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This is the second volume of the Mandelring Quartett's projected Schubert cycle (the first featured the E-Major Quartet and the "Death and the Maiden"). Again, the program combines a late and an early quartet, and again the playing is excellent. The Mandelring, multiple prize winners on stage and disc, consists of the siblings Sebastian, Nanette, and Bernard Schmidt and violist Roland Glassl, but its fine intonation, balance, unanimity, and ensemble cannot be due only to the members' close family ties. In the E Major Quartet - published as Op. 125, but written when Schubert was only 19 - the players capture the youthful exuberance of the opening movement, the simplicity of the second, and the robustness and delicacy of the third. The finale, which repeats the same running passages in innumerable keys, is brilliant. The great A Minor Quartet is beautifully wistful, poetic, and expressive without being fussy, simple yet deeply felt; the finale is leisurely, graceful, and poised.

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