



The RIAS Amadeus Quartet Haydn Recordings

aud 21.426

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The sixth volume in Audite's survey of the Amadeus Quartet's RIAS broadcasts covers a two-decade period between 1950 and 1969 and focuses securely on the Haydn quartets. Lest this seem merely peripheral or ancillary to the ensemble's commercial discography it should be pointed out that of the fourteen quartets and the quartet version of The Seven Last Words included in the box, three of the quartets were never recorded by the Amadeus in the studio: Op.9 No.3, Op.20 No.5 and Op.33 No.2. That is certainly reason enough for considering this 5-CD collection.

Audite have taken the decision to programme the quartets chronologically so that the trio of previously unrecorded quartets appear on the very first CD. This also means that a work recorded in 1951 can be followed by one taped in 1969 which is itself followed by something from 1950. It's fortunate that the engineers achieved so high a standard throughout the sequence, so that the switch between years is not jarring. Op.9 No.3 is quite taut and forward-moving in the opening, possibly more Allegro than Moderato as marked whilst Brainin's concertante role in the Menuet is played with rich sweetness. The Adagio in Op. 20 No.5 is beautifully cantilevered, songfully expressive with the decorate first violin flourishes dexterously dispatched. Op.33 No.3, nicknamed The Joke, goes so well in this performance that one wonders why it was so seldom played and never recorded by the quartet. These are the many highlights of the first disc but one shouldn't omit the rapt slow movement of Op. 54 No.2 which is heard in two contexts – firstly in a performance of the quartet from 1969 and as an appendix, as an isolated movement in a broadcast from June 1950.

Though one now moves into terra cognita from the second disc onwards there are always changes in emphasis or breadth when considering these broadcast performances in the context of the DG legacy. So, for instance, the 1956 reading of Op.64 No.3 is more tightly charged than the later 1973 studio reading and so too is the slow movement of Op.64 No.4 from 1959. There's just a little bit of an edge to the corporate sound in the November 1951 recording of Op.74 No.1 but it sounds altogether more committed than the tamer-sounding DG LP. I happen to find the tempo of this 1957 reading of the slow movement of The Rider, Op.74 No.3, preferable to the significantly slower but beautifully voiced DG. The group's readings of Opp.76 and 77 were always amongst their very best and Op.76 No.1 is no exception. There's little to choose between this 1960 performance and the commercial recording, as the slow movement is beautiful in both cases. The bucolic pizzicati in the succeeding Menuet work equally well here, as indeed does the buoyant and nobly conceived reading of the Emperor, recorded in April 1951. Like the studio performance, the slow movement of The Sunrise is quite expansive. Disc



four reveals an Op.77 No.1 that's slightly more mellow sounding than the shriller DG recording. Warmer, wittier and a lot less acidic this is a real improvement on that commercial legacy. Though the 1950 sound is not of the best, the performance of Op.77 No.2 is laudable with an especially touching and solemn close to the Andante. The Seven Last Words dates from December 1952 and its meditative beauties are perfectly conveyed in this reading. Note that an extended version with the German texts is available as a free download via Audite.

A well-crafted booklet, in German and English, reinforces the novelty of those three early quartets and the fact that all the performances are making their first ever commercial appearance here. All this makes this box of high importance to admirers of this august group.

Joseph HAYDN (1732–1809)

String Quartets - Volume 6

Amadeus String Quartet

rec. 1950–69, Berlin, Siemensvilla, Berlin-Lankwitz except
Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin-Dahlem (Op.64 no.4), Studio 7,
RIAS Funkhaus (Op.77 no.2)

Mono except Op.54 No.2 and Op.77 No.1

AUDITE 21.426 [5 CDs: 313:23]

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