



Dmitri Shostakovich: The Complete String Quartets

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A Survey of Shostakovich String Quartet Cycles

[...] The Mandelring cycle on Audite was the first (and remains, as of late 2018, the only) set on SACD. It is among the very best sounding cycles, even on the Red-Book CD layer. To quote from the recommendation in Surprised by Beauty: "The Mandelring Quartett are Shostakovich-seducers, not Shostakovich-enforcers and they bring out the sheer beauty of all of Shostakovich's brilliantly harrowing ugliness. Three of its four members are siblings and the fourth plays as if he were a family member. They perform as if these quartets were taking place inside a single soul, achieving an extraordinary quality of interiority and unanimity. Accentuating surfaces more than spikes, corners, and gore, their rhythmic beat is propulsive but rarely maniacal and their splendid sound matches that of the recording: a perfect foil to more fervent, rougher interpretations." David Hurwitz agrees more or less on ClassicsToday. In-depth ionarts review here. Note that the individual releases are hybrid-SACDs whereas the set is CD-only!



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by jfl | Friday, October 05, 2018



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Continuing my discographies, this is a survey of - hopefully - every extant recorded cycle of Shostakovich's String Quartets. As opposed to the 16 quartets of Beethoven's, where the survey covers nearly six dozen cycles, there are 'only' about 20 such cycles of Shostakovich's String Quartets out. For now, they are neatly bookended by the Borodin Quartet's first and fourth attempt at a cycle. (Raising the question, à la "Can you step in the same river twice?", whether a string quartet is still the same string quartet 50 years later, with all new members).

The Borodin also raises the question as to what is a complete-enough cycle. Their first cycle, containing quartets 1-13, certainly counts - it was complete at the time and 13 out of 15 ain't bad. The Borodin's digital re-recordings of quartets 2, 3, 7, 8 & 12 for Virgin, however, which may or may not have been intended to be a cycle, don't qualify in my book. (Also, I don't think they are particularly good). Neither do the Hagen Quartet, who recorded six quartets (3, 7, 8 & 4, 11, 14), the excellent Jerusalem Quartet's 6/15 cycle (*ionarts review*), the St. Petersburg Quartet's first go at it for Sony (1, 2, 4 + 3, 5, 7), or the Rubio Quartet's first attempt at a cycle on Globe from 1996 - 98 (1, 4, 8, 2, 3, 5 + 7, 9, 12) or the Quatuor Debussy's six quartets (3, 7, 10, & 4, 8, 13), or the Aviv Quartet's eight quartets (1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 13), or the Prazak's two discs (7, 8, 14, 15 + op.36), or the Kopelman Quartet's recordings on Nimbus (1, 8 + Miaskovsky, 2 + E.Kissin [sic!], 3, 7 + Prokofiev & 10 + Weinberg), although their programming was innovative and prefigured the Pacifica cycle. (Then again, it still seems ongoing and might yet be finished.) There's even the Japanese Morgaua Quartet recording these works (when they don't dabble in progressive rock) with a cycle about half-way through and available only from/via Japan.

I am sitting on the data for several new discographic entries under work. Ring cycles, Mahler, Nielsen, Martinů and Beethoven symphony-cycles, as well as Bartók string quartet-cycles. They just take an awful lot of time to research and then put into html-presentable shape and even then they are rarely complete or mistake free. Neither will this one be, and every such post is also a plea to generously inclined readers with more information and knowledge of the subject than I have to lend a helping hand correcting my mistakes or filling data-lacunae. I am explicitly grateful for any such pointers, hints, and corrections and apologize for any bloomers. Unlike some earlier discographies, this one does intend to be comprehensive. So I am especially grateful if sets that I have missed are pointed out to me. I have not listened to them all, of course, but most. Favorites are indicated with the "ionarts choice" graphic. With several hundred links in this document, there are, despite my best efforts, bound to be some that are broken or misplaced; I am glad about every correction that comes my way about those, too.

Mandelring Quartett (2005 – 2009)

Sebastian Schmidt, Nanette Schmidt, Roland Glassl, Bernhard Schmidt

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