



String Quartets by Brahms (Op. 51, No. 2) & Dessooff (Op. 7)

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You will be relieved to see your name on the title page of the quartet preserved for posterity. When people have forgotten your German Requiem, people will then say, 'Brahms'? Oh yes, he's the one to whom Dessooff's Op. 7 is dedicated!

The above quotation is from Felix Otto Dessooff (1835-1892), who is best known as the conductor who led the first performance of Brahms's First Symphony. Dessooff was an excellent composer who wrote only a small amount of music. It seems that he stopped composing when his conducting career demanded all of his time. He dedicated his only string quartet to Brahms, with whom he had a close friendship. He uses harmonic language that is similar to the Brahms but uses it differently. This is not a work that copies Brahms, but it shows similar influences. One influence makes itself very clear: It bears homage to II of Beethoven's Opus 59:3 (Quartet 9).

It is a shame that Dessooff only wrote one string quartet, but this is a real gem, and it holds its own next to Brahms. I find it more enjoyable to listen to than the intense Brahms A-minor (No. 2). This is part of an eye-and-ear-opening set of recordings by the Mandelring Quartet that pair Brahms's three quartets with quartets by three of his close friends. The playing by this quartet, that has siblings as three of its members, is excellent.