



The RIAS Amadeus Quartet Schubert Recordings

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EAN: 4022143214287



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www.musicweb-international.com (Jonathan Woolf - 2014.04.08)

This new tranche of RIAS recordings of the Amadeus Quartet concentrates on another composer most dear to the group's collective heart, Schubert. It is therefore much less extensive than the Beethoven box which was almost complete in its reach (see review); this set, by comparison, has only two CDs. The Amadeus performed regularly for RIAS during the quartet's Berlin visits, of which there were many. The earliest Schubert to be set down for the expert engineers was the Op. posth. G major, D.887, recorded in June 1950. The most recent is the G minor, D.173, taped in December 1964. There are five quartets, and they include Death and the Maiden and Rosamunde.

As in that Beethoven set we are confronted by an infusion of a parallel discography, an appendix of broadcast material to the main body of the quartet's studio, commercial discography. And it has to be said that there are very few striking deviations from expected expressive norms in these five quartets. Tempi are often very similar, and the music's development is largely a mirror of the studio performances, so that when there is a deviation it seems like a vast anomaly. I can really only cite the slow movement of D.87 which the Amadeus play for RIAS in a much slower and more prayerful way than in their later studio inscription. The RIAS way has just a hint of hymnal piety about it. Otherwise the quartet performance has sufficient charm in the outer movements and burst of vigour in the Scherzo. The 1956 Rosamunde is very similar indeed to the 1951 studio recording and maybe it's only in the bringing out of the inner voicings that you can tell that the adrenalin of a live performance generates slightly more heat – that ability to balance the quartet so well is also a RIAS technical matter, of course. Throughout, the balance and sound is extremely fine.

The only salient difference between the RIAS and studio Death of the Maiden concerns the finale, which is taken slower in Berlin than in the commercial LP. It makes little real difference as the performance itself convinces however they take it; there is a rich, ripe tone from top to bottom and the interpretation is searching and wholly convincing on its own terms. The broadest performance is that of D.887 but, again, speeds never drag and there is a wholly communicative interplay at work and a very special sound world that the foursome captures. It elevates these performances, and their studio confreres, to the status of being amongst the finest Schubert quartet performances of the 1950s.

If you have the group's studio inscriptions you will not find that there is any real interpretative divergence from these RIAS broadcasts. They are too close in time, and the group's tonal qualities remain consonant. Broadcast material from a decade later would have shown lengthening shadows, but here the quartet is near its peak. As I said, the recording quality and subsequent re-mastering is first-class, as are the

booklet notes.

