



Ludwig van Beethoven: Complete String Quartets

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Gramophone (Nalen Anthoni - 2014.02.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Not perfunctory but not penetrating either. The Quartetto di Cremona are equal to technical demands but often wary of total involvement. A commitment to the first movement of Op 59 No 02, presaged by the dramatic opening chords, is only partially realised. The playing isn't slack; neither is it as tightly disciplined as in the Scherzo, its syncopated rhythm tersely recreated.

Likewise the final Presto; but why back away from the full import of the slow movement? The marking is Molto adagio reinforced with the instruction 'this piece is to be played with much feeling'. Response isn't wholehearted.

Reticence also underlines the slow movement of Op 127, six variations and coda on a beatific theme. Adagio again, initially, but now non troppo, the time signature of 12/8 probably meant to be a brake on a quick pulse, 'not too much' as it were. But the point is missed by these musicians; and their pace, closer to Andante, only partially reveals depths. Shallow and at times bodiless sound, depriving the ensemble of sonority, doesn't help matters either, leading to a question: does a disc recorded in 24-bit 44.1kHz PCM qualify for SACD status?

Internal balance of the ensemble is just and the performances overall are good. But music of such intense concentration and consequence requires much more than the Quartetto di Cremona offer, hearts-on-sleeve in the movements that matter most in each work. The Belcea Quartet go for broke in interpretations of a pre-eminence that spans many dimensions.