



Ludwig van Beethoven: Complete String Quartets

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[American Record Guide](#) (Paul L Althouse - 2014.12.01)

This is the third volume of the Cremona's Beethoven Quartets. The first installment with Quartets 6, 11, and 16 was reviewed by Greg Pagel (S/O 2013). I took on 8 and 12 (M/J 2014). I felt with 8 and 12, two of Beethoven's best, that the performances were too direct and uninflected. The players' technical abilities are first rate, so I was hoping that time and experience would deepen their Beethoven. (The liner notes to the present release liken the Cremona, a young Italian group, to the Quartetto Italiano, and I guess I have to call that premature!)

If there are problems with maturity, they don't show up in Quartet 4, an enthusiastic, dramatic affair from early in Beethoven's career. The playing is sharply articulate, enthusiastic, and somewhat Haydnesque—in other words, a fine, outgoing, “young” performance. Some of my characterization of the playing comes from the sonics, which are bright and leave violinist Cristiano Gualco sounding a bit wiry; put another way, the CD hasn't very much warmth, so this doesn't sound like a burnished German group.

Quartet 7 (Razoumovsky 1) is nicely done—standard tempos with fine control of the many exposed places. I was particularly pleased that when called for, their playing can be very quiet. Many groups glide over Beethoven's dynamics and sforzandos, but the Cremona observes them well, bringing interest to the piece without calling undue attention.

As for Quartet 16, the Grosse Fuge, I'm never sure what to say. The piece seems to be overwhelming in its intellect and emotion, but I'm not certain I “get it”. At any rate the Cremona, like most quartets, slash and burn their way through the piece.

In sum I have a better impression of the Cremona in this installment, even if I wouldn't place them with the Quartetto Italiano quite yet. The bright sound is a small impediment for me, but on different equipment with surround sound it might be perfectly fine.