



Quartetto Italiano - The complete RIAS Recordings

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Gramophone (Rob Cowan - 2019.07.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Claims of consistency on Heifetz's behalf are more than matched by the invariable beauty of tone – and musical vision – that the Quartetto Italiano achieved when at the height of their powers, which they certainly were during the period from 1951 to 1963. Their complete RIAS recordings, now released by Audite, showcase the quartet's expertise in repertoire ranging from Cherubini to Shostakovich, whose Quartet No 7 they perform with a combination of warmth and ferocity. Of Donizetti's 18 string quartets (early works that predate his operas), the Seventh anticipates the melodic slant of the composer's mature bel canto style, in the first movement's lovely second subject, for example. Cherubini's penultimate quartet (he wrote six in all) is crowned by an especially beautiful Adagio, where Quartetto Italiano achieve a seamless tonal blend. All three works are new to the ensemble's discography. The first disc concludes with Malipiero's gritty Fourth Quartet of 1934. Ravel's Quartet is given with an unusual degree of deliberation. Schubert's B flat Quartet, D112, is bewitching from beginning to end, the Andante sostenuto second movement just that, even broader (by a minute) than the wonderful pre-war Busch Quartet recording (Warner Classics). The third disc enshrines performances of Schumann's Second and Third Quartets that bring out the music's songful elements, especially in the Third Quartet's expressive opening. Which leaves just Haydn's late G major Quartet, Op 77 No 1, the opening less bouncy than some, though the finale goes at a real lick. Good sound clinches a terrific collection.