

BEETHOVEN

COMPLETE STRING QUARTETS

audite

VOL. VIII




SUPER
AUDIO CD

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**String Quartet in D major, Op. 18, No. 3**

- I. Allegro 7:56
- II. Andante con moto 8:23
- III. Allegro 3:12
- IV. Presto 6:10

String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 74 'Harp'

- I. Poco Adagio – Allegro 9:32
- II. Adagio ma non troppo 9:14
- III. Presto 5:10
- IV. Allegretto con Variazioni 6:45

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

Cristiano Gualco, Violine
Paolo Andreoli, Violine
Simone Gramaglia, Viola
Giovanni Scaglione, Violoncello



Cremona in April

... is a promise. The cool morning hours pass quickly, the sky above the river Po seems to be ablaze even at midday, people in the piazza in front of the cathedral are either taking a stroll or enjoying a glass of Franciacorta under the arcades of the town hall. The maze of alleyways and side streets, stretching out beneath the Torrazzo – the slim, ancient bell tower with its languidly ticking astronomical clock – houses more than a hundred luthier workshops, following on from the likes of Stradivari and Guarneri. In one piazza, Cremona's palace of art can be found, built in the angular style of fascist modernism, which today accommodates the violin museum as well as a new, breathtakingly curved auditorium.

The members of the Quartetto di Cremona, Cristiano, Paolo, Simone and Giovanni, agree that this is not a bad location in which to work. Originally from the frantic port of Genoa, they come to Cremona mainly to teach at the "Accademia Walter Stauffer". Since 2011, they have been imparting their art to young quartets from Italy or Switzerland – painstaking work, for Italy has seen virtually no top-class ensembles of international renown since the glorious days of the Quartetto Italiano. "This was due to the dominance of opera, but also an ingrained ignorance regarding chamber music, and a lack of support for music", the quartet's violist, Simone Gramaglia, points out wistfully.

But this grim situation has improved over recent years with, as in Germany and elsewhere, young quartets also popping up in Italy. "There is a form of renaissance of the string quartet", says Simone, "and that is down to us: I'm very proud of that." The Quartetto di Cremona has indeed contributed significantly to this development: by teaching courses at the Stauffer Academy; by working with collectors who make precious instruments available to young artists; or through projects such as "Le dimore del quartetto" which encourages owners of historical villas and palazzi to host young quartets for periods of time.

Beethoven as a Touchstone

At present, the four players of the Quartetto di Cremona are still teaching in more or less comfortable dressing rooms and salons of the Teatro Ponchielli in the town centre. This atmospheric makeshift arrangement, however, will change once the Stauffer Academy is able to move into a villa which has been customised specifically for music tuition. In order to be able to compete internationally, young performers need to hone their musical skills with the help of experienced professionals as well as build their concert repertoire stretching from Haydn through to modernism – and the early years of young ensembles often see a lot of blood, sweat and tears, but seldom money.

If we take a look at a stock piece such as Beethoven's Quartet in D major, Op. 18 No 3, it soon becomes apparent that, despite its serenely classical stance, from the beginning the players have to overcome a number of hurdles. The first violin opens with the unstable interval of a seventh, marked *piano* and using two stretched semibreves which hardly give any inkling of the fast allegro theme. Only gradually, as the remaining strings enter and the texture is flowing along, do harmony and tempo become clearer. A clear concept of tempo, character and drama is needed even in these opening bars. As expected, sentiment and tone quality are central in the andante con moto; Beethoven contrasts the warmly harmonised, evocative melody of the second violin with a slightly old-fashioned secondary theme. A Haydnesque minuet with a minor-keyed middle section ("minore") leads into the finale which Beethoven conceived as a tarantella: in the melting pot of Vienna, where many Italian musicians and publishers worked, this was presumably more than just an exotic colour. From sonic drama to technical fireworks, Beethoven's early collection features all aspects which a quartet needs to be able to master.

For the Quartetto di Cremona, recording the complete Beethoven Quartets – a project which is concluded with this eighth volume – represented a major opportunity to

review and polish its musical outlook and technique. According to the leader, Cristiano Gualco, “Beethoven is probably the only composer who can provide an entire concert programme of quartets – simply because every work is so distinct and tells a different story. The late quartets can’t be explained at all; they work more like our brains: volatile in their perception, full of disruptions and contradictions. Also, when one has played all the quartets, not only does one really know Beethoven, but it also sharpens the mind for all music after him. For everyone has studied Beethoven.”

This impression is confirmed by a quartet which has always been slightly overshadowed by its companion pieces – even though it was given the lyrical sobriquet of “Harp” quartet. A more suitable motto for Beethoven’s Op. 74 might have been “Freudvoll und leidvoll” [joyful and sorrowful], the title of Klärchen’s song in Goethe’s drama *Egmont*, for which Beethoven had composed incidental music for the Vienna Burgtheater in 1809. The early version of the song reappeared in the E flat major quartet as the theme for the variations in the finale. However, the piece opens with a thoughtful adagio introduction, made rugged by its pauses, until an allegro wipes away all brooding with a few striking chords. Here, more than in any other quartet from Beethoven’s “middle” period, the sound determines the character of the work: through constantly changing degrees of density in the writing; through scurrying chains of thirds in the lower parts; through harmonic brightening; and of course through the pizzicato effects (sounding nothing like a harp) which prompted the work’s nickname. The adagio presents an extensive theme that anticipates the chants and “cavatinas” of the late quartets, and the scherzo re-uses the rhythmic energy from the opening of the Fifth Symphony (both movements are in C minor), propelling the “knocking motif” through all the parts. The closing movement with the afore-mentioned song theme is markedly simple, the six variations plus coda following the example of a Haydn or a Mozart.

Success!

Seventeen quartets and a quintet (together with the violist Lawrence Dutton, “on loan” from the Emerson String Quartet) in just over three years: time and again, dates had to be found and bundled in between concerts and lessons, and the owner of the wonderful estate near Turin, housing the “Fondazione Spinola Banna per l’Arte”, had to be available for recordings to take place at a suitable distance from the hustle and bustle of daily life. It was a particular challenge, for twelve hours each day, for both the musicians and the producer, Ludger Böckenhoff to maintain the high levels of concentration, precision and passion that each quartet demands.

Once the stage was set, there was implicit trust – especially after the first successes in the press. The cellist, Giovanni Scaglione, remembers: “At that point, the quartet had been around for twelve years and it was time to position ourselves with an important project. We didn’t want recordings at any cost, but instead to turn up in the right situation with the right works and the right label. Our many Beethoven engagements, even in the USA, and the response from the critics have shown that it worked – we are now a known quantity.” Chuckling, he adds: “And wealth will follow eventually..”

In the meantime, we have relocated from the Teatro Ponchielli to the trattoria “La Sosta”: heavy stoneware with extremely delicate salami accompanied by red wines from the region is doing the rounds. It becomes clear that Italy remains a tricky place for chamber music. But there are many impulses and stimuli, not least thanks to Cristiano, Paolo, Simone and Giovanni, who mentions the first Italian radio broadcast. Back then, in October 1924, the producers did not opt for Verdi’s Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, but instead for two movements from a Haydn string quartet...

Michael Struck-Schloen

Translation: Viola Scheffel



During the past seventeen years the **Quartetto di Cremona** has matured into a string quartet of international renown, combining the Italian culture of string playing with an awareness of historical performance practice. As a quartet of the younger generation, the Quartetto di Cremona has acquired an excellent national and international reputation. Having for many years performed at the great international halls, it is often regarded as the successor to the famous Quartetto Italiano. The musical style of the Quartetto di Cremona is marked by a fruitful tension between Italian and German-Austrian influences. Following their academic studies the players continued their training with Piero Farulli of the Quartetto Italiano. He strongly favoured intuitive playing and a fervent, emotional, romantic and “Italian” approach to music. Afterwards the musicians pursued their studies with Hatto Beyerle of the Alban Berg Quartet. As an expert in the classical era, he represents a clear, classical, “German-Austrian” style, focusing on faithfulness to the original, form and structure as a basis for musical interpretation and inspiration.

Both teachers have left a lasting impression on the quartet and significantly influenced its musical style. The players naturally unite both poles, combining boisterous enthusiasm with a distinct sense for musical architecture, cultivating the fusion of structure and expression, external shape and internal passion.

The Quartetto di Cremona has performed at major festivals in Europe, South America, Asia, Australia and the United States, including Beethovenfest in Bonn, Bozar Festival in Brussels, Cork Festival in Ireland, Turku Festival in Fin-



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land, Perth Festival in Australia and Platonov Festival in Russia. They have performed at such prestigious international concert halls as the Zurich Tonhalle, Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw Amsterdam, Konzerthaus Berlin, Beethoven-Haus Bonn, Laeiszhalle Hamburg, London's Wigmore Hall, The Queen's Hall Edinburgh, Auditorio Nacional de Música Madrid, Stockholm Concert Hall, Bargemusic New York, Herbst Theatre San Francisco, The Vancouver Playhouse, NCPA Beijing and Sala Cecília Meireles Rio de Janeiro.

Since 2010, the Quartetto di Cremona has been Ensemble in Residence at the Società del Quartetto in Milan and as such it is featured in numerous concerts and projects. In 2014, the 150th anniversary of the society, the co-operation culminated in performances of the complete Beethoven String Quartets; in 2016 a similar project will bring the complete Mozart String Quartets on stage.

The quartet collaborates with artists such Pieter Wispelwey, Angela Hewitt Larry Dutton, Antonio Meneses, Andrea Lucchesini, Lilya Zilberstein and Lynn Harrell. Its repertoire ranges from the early works of Haydn to contemporary music; here their particular interest lies in works by Fabio Vacchi, Michele Dall'Ongaro, Helmut Lachenmann and Maxwell Davies.

The musicians are also dedicated to teaching, giving masterclasses throughout Europe. In 2011 the quartet was entrusted with the leadership of the String Quartet Course at the Accademia Walter Stauffer in Cremona, closing a circle, for all four members received their initial training at this institution.

Alongside the latest Beethoven volume, a Saint-Saëns album, recorded together with the pianist Andrea Lucchesini, was released in October 2016.

Thank you for your interest in this audite recording – we hope you enjoy it.

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Quartetto di Cremona

recording:

November 27 - 30, 2015

recording location:

'Fondazione Spinola Banna per l'Arte', Poirino

The 'Fondazione Spinola Banna per l'Arte' was established in 2004 with the aim to promote contemporary art and music. Based in Banna (Poirino, Italy), it administers a number of programs, such as workshops, residencies and commissions for young artists and composers with the supervision of leading figures of the art and music world.

instruments:

violin I: Nicola Amati, 1640

violin II: Paolo Antonio Testore, 1750 Milan

viola: Gioacchino Torazzi, Turin, Italy ca. 1680-1720

cello: Dom Nicola Amati, 1712 Bologna

recording / executive producer:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

editing:

Dipl.-Tonmeister Justus Beyer

photos:

p. 1, 9 + 10: Elisa Caldana

p. 3, 11 + 12: Francesca Ricciardi

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AB•Design

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