

ORION STRING QUARTET

BBC
music
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REVIEWS



BEETHOVEN

String Quartets, Opp. 59, 74 & 95

Orion Quartet

Koch KIC-CD-7681 154:40 mins (3 discs)

BBC Music/Arkiv

As in one or two other string quartets (notably the Emerson), the violinists of the Orion Quartet assume the role of leader by turns; and since they happen to be brothers, the changeover makes less of a noticeable difference to the ensemble's overall sound than might otherwise have been the case. These are altogether fine performances, with unabashed use of portamento for expressive warmth, and the music's essential character unfailingly conveyed: the mysterious intensity of the *pianissimo* fugato that stands at the centre of the opening movement in the first *Razumovsky* Quartet, for instance; the urgency of the *Allegro* in its E minor companion-piece; the mellow lyricism of the *Harp* Quartet's first movement; or the gossamer lightness of the coda that brings the curtain down on the austere F minor Op. 95 with such unexpected airiness.

If I nevertheless have a reservation about these performances, it's that the players ignore all repeats, other than in the minuets or scherzos and the variation finale of the *Harp* Quartet. In the case of the first *Razumovsky* Quartet, the only portion of the entire work Beethoven wanted played twice is the finale's opening stage – less than two minutes out of a total of some 40. The omission of the repeat damages not only the music's proportions, but also its deliberate circular structure, and much the same holds good for the opening *Allegro* in the E minor second quartet. All this is a real pity, since the music-making itself is richly rewarding, and can stand comparison with the best.

Misha Donat

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

SOUND

★★★★★



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