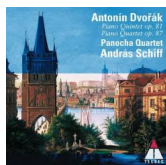


Dvorák - Piano Quintet Op. 81; Piano Quartet Op. 87 (1999)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 22 October 2009 13:30 - Last Updated Sunday, 03 November 2013 16:25

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Piano Quintet n° 2 in A Major, Op.81 1. *Allegro ma non tanto* 2. *Dumka: Andante con moto - Vivace* 3. *Scherzo (Furiant): Molto vivace - Trio: Poco tranquillo* 4. *Finale: Allegro*

Piano Quartet n° 2 in E flat Major, Op.87

1. *Allegro con fuoco* 2. *Lento* 3. *Allegro moderato, grazioso* 4. *Allegro, ma non troppo*

András Schiff - piano Panocha Quartet: Jiří Panocha (violin), Pavel Zejfart (violin), Miroslav Sehnoutka (viola), Jaroslav Kulhan (cello).

The familiar Piano Quintet and the less well known Piano Quartet no. 2 in E flat Op. 87 are both masterpieces; they were recorded in Berlin in 1997. Although Hungarian, Schiff has a natural way with Dvorak, as of course do his partners, the Prague-based Panocha Quartet.

The Panocha were a senior ensemble by this date, having been founded in 1968. If you think of Czech style as being full-bodied and sentimental, they may surprise you with their sensitivity. The microphones are realistically placed, which makes the piano the dominant voice, but even if that weren't so, Schiff's playing always seem to be in the foreground. Compared to Sviatoslav Richter in a classic recording with the Borodin Qt., Schiff plays with restraint, matching well with the strings. Some may therefore find the Quintet's stronger passages not forceful enough, but there's no denying the esprit and nimbleness of this performance. I wanted the melodic lines to soar higher at times -- we never reach the point of joyful abandon - but rhythms feel lively, and the recorded sound is vivid and realistic.

There's considerably less choice in finding a top-flight reading of the piano quartet, which is why I've clung to the one on Sony with a very starry group: Ax-Stern-Laredo-Ma. Chamber music lovers will recognize these names from Sony's extensive recordings of Brahms's chamber music, among other things. they sound like a group of virtuosos where on this recording the strings are more obviously knitted closely together they way an established quartet would be

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(minus the second violin). On balance, Schiff delivers the more animated and energized piano playing, however. The ecstatic opening bars communicate more joy than anything he did in the quintet. In fact, I've never heard such a forceful, authoritative performance from him. In the slow movement, the tender eloquence of the strings is quite noticeable, yet they deliver surges of passion when it's called for.

The Scherzo is a charmer, done with a beguiling Viennese lilt even though the main theme evokes Czech folk melodies. It's here that the players' feeling for their native land comes through vividly; their rivals don't have the accent down. The finale isn't the strongest movement, seeming to me like generic Brahms, but hearing it played with such rhythmic zest and vibrancy makes you forget your doubts. In all, the entire reading easily rises to my first choice in a work that deserves to be more appreciated. It wins over every listener who encounters it. ---Santa Fe Listener, amazon.com

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