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MENDELSSOHN: String Quartet Op.12; Quintet Op.18 - Prazak and Zemlinsky String Quartets - Praga Digitals

A recording that is eminently worthy of this Mendelssohn bicentennial year.

Published on October 19, 2009



MENDELSSOHN: String Quartet Op.12; Quintet Op.18 - Prazak and Zemlinsky String Quartets - Praga Digitals Multichannel SACD PRD/DSD 250252, 59:01 *** [Distr. by Harmonia mundi]:**

It is only recently that Mendelssohn's music has been shown the proper respect. For years the composer was celebrated for his Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Italian Symphony and his Violin Concerto and little else. With the arrival of his bicentennial year Mendelssohn's chamber music is at last being frequently recorded. Mendelssohn was an extremely precocious composer with his ability to create fully developed mature masterpieces as young as age 16. He had a melodic gift that was

second only to Mozart and Schubert and a youthful compositional facility second to none. In fact it was this facility that caused critics to devalue his production. The consensus held that such ease in composing must mean a lack of depth in the works.

The String Quartet in E-flat major Op.12 was composed in 1829 and is influenced by Beethoven who had recently died. It is a serene and melodic work that already hints at Mendelssohn's mature style. Its lyricism is always balanced by discreet counterpoint that gives the work a real sense of unity. The second movement *Canzonetta* is a scherzo in all but name and has Mendelssohn's typical elfin lightness that is magical in its effect. The Prazak Quartet plays the piece with a fine attention to detail, a deftness of touch and a real sense of style. The work is both charming and moving and the performance highlights both attributes in equal measure.

The String Quintet in A major Op.18 was first performed in 1832. It is a mature work, heavily influenced by Mozart and Beethoven, that has a breadth of scale and musical heft that is typical of later Mendelssohn. The first movement *Allegro Con Moto* contains some of the composer's most lyrical music. It balances the depth and beauty of the second movement *Intermezzo* which is a famous slow movement that was composed in Paris. The *Scherzo* is written with the composer's typical love of fantasy and whimsy. The *Allegro Vivace* that ends the work is an appropriate finale. The Zemlinsky Quartet with Josef Kluson on second viola plays the quintet with energy and enthusiasm, highlighting its beauty as well as its musical sophistication.

It is works such as these two that make us puzzle over the slowness with which Mendelssohn's chamber music reputation has grown. That may at last be changing with releases such as this one leading the way. The sound of this SACD is lifelike and deep with a nice sense of presence. There is a warm reverberant glow surrounding the instruments helping to bring the music's inner voices into sharp relief. This is a fine recording eminently worthy of this Mendelssohn bicentennial year.

-- Mike Birman