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PACM093

BUSCH STRING QUARTET

The Beethoven Late Quartets

Pristine
XR

Only the Busch ensemble, in my experience, have presented the Beethoven quartets on record in their full majesty - and daring. Among the qualities that made Adolf Busch a great violinist were his uniquely long bow strokes, controlled with profound intensity and invested with a strong spiritual charge. Believing that the late quartets had to be taken to extremes, he played fast movements very fast - often up to Beethoven's controversial markings - and slow movements very slowly. With a rhythmic sense as rigorous in broad tempi as it was exhilarating in quick tempi, he inspired his colleagues to match him in exceptional feats of concentration. Acting as his own producer, with a trusted HMV engineer such as 'Chick' Fowler, he generally made just one take of each side in a slow movement, so as to keep the intensity going from take to take. The luminous beauty of the Busch Quartet's playing can snatch your breath away in any of their repertoire, but the uninitiated should start with late Beethoven.

From "The Busch Quartet" by **Tully Potter**, *Gramophone*, November 2013, *excerpt*

Producer's Note

These recordings of the late quartets of Beethoven were recorded in HMV at Abbey Road Studios between 1935 and 1937, supplemented by Columbia's recordings of 1941/42 at the Liederkranz Hall in New York City. As with some previous Pristine restorations I've found the best results have come from LP transcriptions of the original 78s, transferred and issued in the days before digital remastering. With limited options for improving sound quality, the onus on engineers was to get the very best from the original masters, often by either playing the metal plates directly or by pressing quiet vinyl copies from them in order to make their transfers. Although it's unclear here which methods were used, both the CBS and EMI vinyl reissues of later decades proved excellent starting points for the present set.

In each case XR remastering has made significant improvements in sound quality, with the higher frequencies now far clearer than before, especially in the otherwise better-recorded Columbia takes. The slightly boxy sound of the HMV studio recordings has also opened out considerably, and overall the impression is of a much fuller, richer and more dynamic sound than might be anticipated from recordings of this era.

The pitching of the original transfers varied considerably. There was also some pitch variance within individual recordings. Here I've chosen to pitch all of the recordings to standard concert pitch. The use of pitch stabilisation software has also enabled the elimination of wow from the original discs, as well as other pitch anomalies.

The Late Quartets don't normally include the 7th Quartet; with the five quartets, 12-16, complete there was a perfect Quartet No. 7-sized gap in CD1, hence its inclusion here.

Andrew Rose

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
SARL Pristine Audio, 144 Rue de l'Eglise, 24610 St. Méard de Gurçon, France

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The Busch String Quartet



The Beethoven Late Quartets

HMV & Columbia Studio Recordings, 1933-1942

CD1 & CD2

Beethoven The Late Quartets



XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of
The Busch String Quartet

String Quartet No. 7 in F, Op. 59, No. 1 "Rasumovsky"

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro (11:33)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando (8:40)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Adagio molto e mesto (12:18)
- 4 4th mvt. - Theme Russe (8:05)

String Quartet No. 12 in E flat, Op. 127

- 5 1st mvt. - Maestoso - Allegro (6:55)
- 6 2nd mvt. - Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile (16:59)
- 7 3rd mvt. - Scherzando vivace (7:44)
- 8 4th mvt. - Finale (6:43)

String Quartet No. 13 in B flat, Op. 130

- 1 1st mvt. - Adagio ma non troppo - Allegro (9:06)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Presto (2:00)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Andante con moto, ma non troppo (5:30)
- 4 4th mvt. - Alla danza tedesca (Allegro assai) (2:31)
- 5 5th mvt. - Cavatina (Adagio molto espressivo) (7:09)
- 6 6th mvt. - Finale (Allegro) (8:45)

String Quartet No. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 131

- 7 1st mvt. - Adagio (7:52)
- 8 2nd mvt. - Allegro molto vivace (3:13)
- 9 3rd mvt. - Allegro moderato (0:52)
- 10 4th mvt. - Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile (15:13)
- 11 5th mvt. - Presto (5:10)
- 12 6th mvt. - Adagio quasi un poco Andante (2:27)
- 13 7th mvt. - Allegro (6:09)

The Busch String Quartet

String Quartet No. 7

Recorded 15/25 May 1942, Liederkranz Hall, New York
Cat. Nos. Columbia 71474-D - 71479-D
Matrices XCO.32832-37; 32869-73

String Quartet No. 12

Recorded 2/16/17 November 1936, Abbey Road Studio 3
Cat. Nos. HMV DB.3044-48
Matrices 2EA.4401-07

String Quartet No. 13

Recorded 13/16 June 1941, Liederkranz Hall, New York
Cat. Nos. Columbia 71220-D - 71224-D
Matrices XCO.30695-704

String Quartet No. 14

Recorded 2 March 1936, Abbey Road Studio 3
Cat. Nos. HMV DB.2810-14
Matrices 2EA.3120-29

Total duration (3 CDs): 3hr 46:42

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BUSCH STRING QUARTET

The Beethoven Late Quartets

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Before the war the Busch Quartet played Beethoven better than any other ensemble, and they still sound marvellous. They were always at their best in the late quartets and with the arrival of these two discs their newly transferred performances of all but the Grosse Fuge are now available. The playing seems more spacious than that of the best modern ensembles; they uncover the musical thought at their leisure. This impression results in part from the very slow tempo in the stow movements, but they can also sound almost leisured even when, according to my watch, the tempo is normal, as in the Scherzo of the F major. I think this is because they seem less prone than modern ensembles to push their own technical accomplishments. Everything is subservient to the music. The slow movement of the E flat is most beautifully done; quaver lengths hardly vary in spite of all Beethoven's changes of tempo, but if the tempo is slow enough at the start they don't need to. The slow movement of the C sharp minor is so thoughtfully played that the Quartet as a whole takes three or four minutes longer than usual, and very moving it sounds. In the very difficult Scherzo that follows the rhythm is uneven in places; here alone complete success eludes the players.

Though the Busch Quartet scooped much less than most ensembles of the 1930s the 1976 listener will certainly notice such scoops as there are. The trick is applied with curious inconsistency. For instance in the first allegro theme of the E flat Busch himself sometimes slides up from the first crotchet to the second (as in the first bar) and sometimes doesn't (as when the same phrase is repeated four bars later); when this phrase is developed by all four players there is similar inconsistency. It must follow that during rehearsals there was never any discussion between the players as to whether they should scoop or not; it was just left to chance like a touch of eighteenth-century improvisation. I do not myself find the trick in any way worrying. Indeed in the first movement of the E flat one can even persuade oneself that it adds a touch of emotion to the sound. The illusion of leisured thinking is here at its very best; the last page seems to me the very perfection of playing. Here and elsewhere pianissimos are a constant wonder.

Bearing in mind that all this music was recorded forty years ago and more, the quality is splendid; furthermore these excellent performances of superb music are very reasonably priced. Strongly recommended.

Review of LP reissue on World Records by **R.F., Gramophone**, November 1976

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The Busch String Quartet



The Beethoven Late Quartets

HMV & Columbia Studio Recordings, 1933-1942

CD3

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BEETHOVEN THE LATE QUARTETS (CD3)
THE BUSCH STRING QUARTET

Beethoven The Late Quartets

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DIGITAL AUDIO
PACM 093

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of
The Busch String Quartet

String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132

- 1 1st mvmt. - Assai sostenuto - Allegro (9:15)
- 2 2nd mvmt. - Allegro ma non tanto (6:49)
- 3 3rd mvmt. - Molto adagio (19:36)
- 4 4th mvmt. - Alla Marcia, assai vivace (1:55)
- 5 5th mvmt. - Allegro appassionato (6:09)

String Quartet No. 16 in F, Op. 135

- 6 1st mvmt. - Allegretto (6:59)
- 7 2nd mvmt. - Vivace (3:18)
- 8 3rd mvmt. - Lento assai cantate e tranquillo (10:27)
- 9 4th mvmt. - Grave - Allegro, Grave ma non troppo tratto - Allegro (7:10)

String Quartet No. 15
Recorded 7 October 1937, Abbey Road Studio 3
Cat. Nos. HMV DB.3375-3380s
Matrices 2EA.5464-68/71-76

String Quartet No. 16
Recorded 13 November 1933, Abbey Road Studio 3
Cat. Nos. HMV DB.2113-16
Matrices 2B.5436-43

The Busch String Quartet:

Adolf Busch *violin*

Gösta Andreasson *violin*

Karl Doktor *viola*

Hermann Busch *cello*

Total duration (3 CDs): 3hr 46:42

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BEETHOVEN THE LATE QUARTETS (CD3)
THE BUSCH STRING QUARTET

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