

Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

February, 2017



Chopin: 24 Preludes, Op. 28
Schumann: Fantasie, Op. 17
Horacio Gutiérrez, piano (Bridge)

Cuban-American pianist Horacio Gutiérrez displays solid musicianship and technical prowess in two of the most difficult works in the romantic repertoire, Frédéric Chopin's 24 Preludes, Op. 28, and Robert Schumann's Fantasie in C major, Op. 17. In both cases, commentators usually fall back on the technical aspects of the work for want of an explanation of what it's all about.

Chopin's Preludes have often elicited confusion on that score from critics as diverse as Schumann, who found in them a bewildering assortment of "sketches, studies, or if you wish, a few eagle's feathers," and André Gide, who querulously asked: "Preludes to *what*?" Fair enough. Actually, the 19th century understood the allusion better than the 20th. Franz Liszt prefaced his symphonic poem *Les Préludes* with a quote from the poet Lamartine: "What else is our life but a series of preludes to that unknown Hymn, the first and solemn note of which is intoned by Death?"

You can, of course, choose to focus on the technical features of the music, on Chopin's great achievement in basing his preludes on a circle of fifths with each major key followed by its relative minor. Or you can focus on such pianistic demands as maintaining the steady melodic line in the hauntingly beautiful F-sharp minor Prelude in the face of the departures from it in the way of

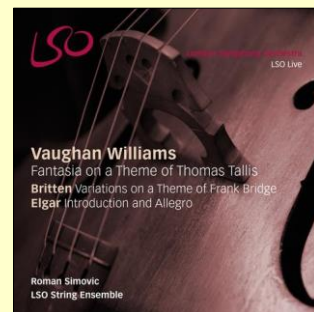


Chopin: Ballades, Scherzi, Nocturne in C-sharp minor – Islam Manafov, piano (Solo Musica)

Islam Manafov, born in Baku, Azerbaijan more than fifty years ago, began his piano studies at the Baku Music School. He performed Sergei Rachmaninov's daunting Third Piano Concerto at the tender age of 17, completing his formal education at the Moscow Conservatory. He has performed widely in the cities of Russia and the former Soviet Union, and his fame is starting to spread in many European countries. This new CD, his first, should help to make him very much in demand on an international basis.

You don't have to listen to this album long to understand the reason why. This man is great! He has a superb feeling for the flow and the textures of the works he performs here. He encompasses the vitally important subsidiary passages as well as he does the great themes and large sonorities in his Chopin. And he infuses everything he plays with a wonderful poetic sensibility that shines forth from the Steinway D on which he performs in the present recordings – poetry of the sort that is not the first thing one thinks about when the topic is Steinway. (Big sound, yes, and Manafov has got it, but not poetry of *this* magnitude!)

Musically and technically, Manafov meets some of Chopin's most challenging work, the four Ballades and the four Scherzos, with such success he reminds me, in terms of



Vaughan Williams, Britten, Elgar
Roman Simovic, LSO String Ensemble (LSO Live)

The LSO String ensemble, under the direction of Roman Simovic, gives us another fine account of masterworks for string orchestra. Always sturdy and affectionate, and with a grasp of technique that is often scintillating, they do a splendid job of bringing out the rich harmonies in wonderful works by Sir Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten that reflect the abiding love the English have always had for this particular genre.

Elgar's Introduction and Allegro, with an undulating melody in the Allegro section that he later described as "smiling with a sigh" and a lovely theme for the solo viola that was based on a tune he had heard sung by distant voices while on vacation in Wales, is the most accessible of all the three works in this program. It ends with what he termed "a devil of a fugue" (and *how!*)

Vaughan Williams' Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis uses a similar body of divided strings, from which a quartet emerges, as did the Elgar. VM took his theme from a Psalm tune by English composer Thomas Tallis (1505-1585). Taking his starting point from Tallis' glowing harmonization of a modal melody (the Phrygian, for those who care about such things) he created a strikingly beautiful work in which layered textures reflect the tensile strength of Tudor ployphony.

arabesques, chromatic progressions and other flights of imagination. Or consider the repeated bass note in the songlike A-flat Prelude that must be struck with great strength while the melody itself is undergoing a *diminuendo*.

The Preludes *can* be programmed as individual items in a recital or played as choice encores. Ten of them have durations of less than a minute, and another nine less than two minutes, making them ideal for these purposes. But if you are going to perform or record the complete set of 28, you must have a concept in mind or else you have confusion.

Horacio Gutiérrez is just as solid in that department as his keyboard technique is impressive, utilizing all the sonorous resources of the Steinway D concert grand at his disposal. This is, in fact, the best and most recommendable recording I can remember hearing of these intriguing pieces in which glorious, life-affirming lyricism often seems to contend with the tidal pull of death. (For the record, Chopin completed the Preludes during his ill-fated "recuperative" holiday with George Sand in Majorca the winter of 1838-1839, during which time he was close to death on several occasions.) We hear one of those tidal pulls in the so-called "Raindrop" Prelude, No.15 in D-flat major. Here, a single note from the steady accompaniment to what has been a charming lyrical melody suggestive of softly falling rain suddenly takes on a maleficent life of its own as an obsessive chain of sullen, repeated notes, like the harbinger of impending tragedy.

To be continued below ==>

Gutiérrez is equally impressive in Robert Schumann's great Fantasia in C major. Again, a consistent concept seems to override the initial impression this work might make on a first-time listener, that of being unpredictable in mood and as uneven in texture as crunchy peanut butter. In the hands of Gutiérrez, it emerges as a thrilling flight of the imagination and a passionately conceived working-through of emotions. It moves from initial longing and despair to the elation of a triumphant struggle, and ultimately tranquility, bliss and romance. At the end, all painful memories have been transformed into supreme tenderness. That's as Schumann intended, for he wrote the Fantasia in 1838 as a love-envoi to his beloved Clara Wieck, whose father adamantly opposed their marriage. Judging from her secret correspondence with Robert, Clara certainly got the message of this fantastic work. Its three movements embody passionate yearning, a triumphant march, and an exalted nocturne breathing an aura of peace, love, and fulfillment. Gutiérrez captures these various moods perfectly. He also surmounts the Fantasia's great technical demands, including the incredible coda at the end of the second movement in which leaping syncopations seem to spring out at us at something like the speed of light! (In Schumann's day, only the Fantasia's dedicatee, Franz Liszt, is said to have been able to master its demands.)

his achievement, of accounts of these same works by the American pianist Abbey Simon and also the intuitive approach of German pianist Burkard Schliessmann (see my *Classical Reviews*, July 2016). The Ballades, by their nature, are a union of lyrical and dramatic elements. Mood changes can be very sudden, as in Ballade No. 2 in F minor, which begins quietly in a story-telling mood. Unexpectedly, something alarming, even terrifying, breaks out in the second section, marked "*Presto con fuoco*" (with fire). It rages unabated, in time becoming interwoven with the first theme, subsiding into a more somber mood, and then flaring up again in a highly charged climax before giving way at last to the first theme which dies away in a whisper.

The four Scherzi. Opp. 20, 31, 39, and 54, belie their innocent-sounding name which implies a joke. On the contrary, the basic moods of these miniature dramas with sonata-like elements in concentrated form, can be quite serious. Even here, as in Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat minor, where we have one of Chopin's most beautiful cantabile melodies for the second subject as a relief from the prevailing turbulence, the composer doesn't neglect his lyricism. The Nocturne in C-sharp minor, which opens with a theme of such haunting beauty in the section marked "*Lento con gran espressione*" (slow with great expression) that it feels almost painful, completes the recital in a very satisfying way.

Finally, Britten's Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge pays tribute to the 24-year old composer's beloved mentor. It begins with the most stirring call to attention imaginable, and includes a rigorous fugue as its final variation. Britten intended the work to illustrate aspects of Bridge himself as man, composer, and teacher. It isn't very euphonious music for all that, and it demands much of the listener. Variations 4, 6, and 7 take a passing nod (or *swipe*?) at Rossini, Ravel and Stravinsky in *Aria Italiana*, *Wiener Walzer*, and *Moto perpetuo*, respectively. As we might have guessed, the scintillating nod to Rossini is the sole light-hearted variation in a work that impresses by its seriousness (Vars. 8 and 9 are a Funeral March and a Chant that plays like a threnody. How serious is *that*?)

At 54 minutes, this is short measure for a compact disc. No matter: you will want to encore it right away!



Beethoven: Symphony No. 7, Triple Concerto – Bernard Haitink, London Symphony Orchestra (LSO Live)

Just when I'd begun to lament that there weren't any more great new releases of Beethoven symphonies, here comes Bernard Haitink and the London Symphony Orchestra to prove me wrong! These recordings made live at the Barbican, London, November, 2005 are as thoroughly satisfying in terms of body, nuance and alert pacing as any I've heard.

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92, was conceived by Beethoven without a slow movement. In it, the composer seems to wonder: "How many different ways can I spell rhythm and tempo?" In particular, the Allegretto, which here takes the place of a true slow movement, made quite a sensation with its distinctive long-short-short rhythm in a slow march consisting of variations on a minor-key theme. The fact that it is interrupted at several points by more stirring episodes enhances the striking effect this movement makes on the listener. Haitink's choices of tempi here are absolutely flawless, as this is a true allegretto and not a slow movement in disguise.

The opening movement, whose slow introduction conceals a coiled spring that Beethoven is presently going to unleash with a rush on the listener, is beautifully paced. The scherzo movement, *Presto*, beguiles with its thematic simplicity and its alternation of light-spirited playfulness and forte outbursts. The exuberant finale, driven by off-beat accents and repeated-note figures, is so utterly compelling in this account it will leave you on the edge of your seat!

The Concerto in C for Piano, Violin,

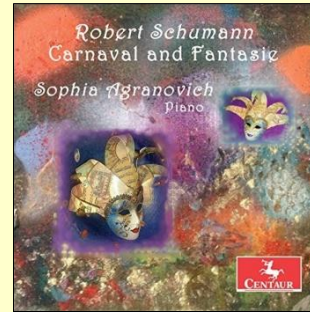


"Words Fail," Violin-Piano Recital Yevgeny Kutik, violin; John Novacek, piano (Marquis)

Yevgeny Kutik, Belarus-born violinist who emigrated to the U.S. with his parents at the age of five in 1990, gives performances worthy of the great Jewish violinists of yesteryear in an intriguing program entitled "Words Fail." The title, which is actually that of the selection by Timo Andres on Tr. 6, reflects the often-observed fact that music, being "pure" tone and emotion, has the power to express feelings that are ineffable in spoken language.

The idea that music is "the truest communicator of [my] barest ideas and emotions" (Kutik) has been articulated musically at least as far back as the piano pieces Felix Mendelssohn published as "Songs without Words." We are given three, arranged for violin and piano: Op. 19, No. 1; 62, No. 6; and 67, No. 2. Kutik, for the sake of stimulating our imagination, omits their nicknames, but one of them is clearly the "Spring Song," so often abused in popular culture (but *not* here!) As Kutik puts it, "The thoughts expressed to me by the music are not too indefinite to be put into words, but on the contrary, too definite."

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's "Song without Words," heard here in the arrangement by Fritz Kreisler that capitalizes on its sweetness and purity and still allows scope for discrete virtuosity, pays tribute to Mendelssohn in its title. Kutik faces greater challenges in a setting for violin and piano of the Adagietto from Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 5, which the composer wrote as a love-letter to his wife. Even with the clarity of the Mahler original, it is



Schumann: Carnaval, Fantasie in C Sophia Agranovich, piano (Centaur)

Sophia Agranovich, native of Ukraine who now lives in the U.S. with the New York City area as her home base, gives stunning accounts of two of Robert Schumann's best-loved and most difficult works for solo piano. And she brings both of them off in a manner that made me feel I understood them better in spite of many years' previous acquaintance.

Carnaval, perhaps Schumann's best known piano work, is deliberately and notoriously uneven in texture, touch, and tempi in a way that fascinates and frustrates keyboard artists. It unfolds in 20 numbered sections which reflect aspects of Schumann's personality, his life and loves, and his artistic ideals. It does not however flow smoothly any more than did the composer's life itself. Of the pianist, Carnaval requires frequent hand repositionings, even within the same short piece (the majority are around a minute's duration, more or less). Frequent changes in mood, flow, and technique necessitate that the artist be continually alert.

Here we have thumbnail portraits of Commedia masks (Pierrot, Arlequin, Pantaloon, Columbine) and the two sides of Schumann's personality, the contemplative dreamer (Eusebius) and the man of commitment to a cause (Florestan). We are also given, pieces depicting his future wife (*Chiarina*, Clara) and a previous love (*Estrella*), coquettes and social butterflies (*Papillons*) at a masked ball, nods to two figures Schumann greatly admired (Chopin, Paganini), and finally a March of the *Davidsbund* against the Philistines that embodied his revolutionary ideals in music,

and Cello makes an ideal album-mate for the 7th Symphony, as its genial lightness obscures the fact that it too is a remarkable technical achievement. Its opening Allegro swings in gaily like a carousel with its short-long, short-long dotted rhythms and jogging triplets in the accompaniment. The length of this movement (here 17:39) is made necessary by the fact that all three instruments must have a jolly good crack at the exposition and recapitulation. Any resulting longeurs that might derive from this are alleviated by Beethoven's lively tempi and Haitink's very alert pacing. Gordan Nikolitch (violin), Tim Hugh (cello) and Lars Vogt (piano) undertake their roles with irresistible zeal.

The Largo movement is quite short (5:01 here) but has an indescribably beautiful duet for violin and cello, with the piano providing discrete accompaniment. The ebullient finale, *Rondo alla Polacca*, dances in on the tempo of a Polonaise, adding to this work's quick-footed charm.

difficult for solo violin and piano to replicate the richness of a whole string orchestra, although the dark sound of Kutik's instrument brings out a special poignancy.

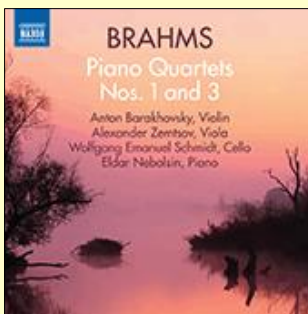
The moderns are not neglected, either. We have Olivier Messiaen's early *Thème et Variations*, more heart-on-sleeve than we usually associate with this most precise of composers but with the evocations of bird-song that preoccupied him all his life. Prokofiev is represented by his Five Melodies, Op. 35*bis*, pieces that are often filled with longing (No. 2, *Lento*) or with sudden vigorous outbursts (No. 3, *Animato*) but never fail to manifest the paradox that we find in great music that expressions of sadness can make us feel good.

Finally, we have three present-day composers, each of whom has something vital to say to us: Michael Gandolfi (b.1956) in the emotional range and acrid harmonies of his *Arioso Doloroso / Estatico*, and Timo Andres (b.1985) in the coruscating colors of "Words Fail," a piece that takes full advantage of the violin's vocal qualities. Lera Auerbach (b.1973) in her *T'Filah* (Prayer), a memorial to victims of the Holocaust and of oppression everywhere, impresses with a deeply moving five minutes' threnody that (unless my ears deceive me) includes the challenge for the performer of *sul ponticello* bowing below the bridge crossing on the neck of the violin.

building to a terrific *Prestissimo!*

The *Fantasie* in C major, Op. 17, has long been a favorite of pianists and audiences alike for its fantastic imagination and its abundance of romantic fervor. Schumann had his beloved Clara Wieck, his union with whom was still opposed by her father, clearly in mind when he wrote it. Most of its exalted feeling occurs in the first movement, subtitled "Thoroughly fantastic and passionate" (*Durchaus fantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen*) and the third and final movement, marked "Slow, sustained. Always soft" (*Langsam getragen. Durchwegs leise zu halten*). These markings provide guideposts for a sensitive artist such as Agranovich as to how to manage the flow of motion and emotion.

The middle movement, "Moderate. Always energetic" (*Massig. Durchaus energisch*) lives up to its billing in the formidable demands it makes of the performer, including the fantastic syncopated leaps in the coda for which my pet name is "Schumann's boogie-woogie." Agranovich handles it all with style and intelligence.



Brahms: Piano Quartets Nos. 1 & 3
Eldar Nebolsin, piano; Anton Barakchovskiy, violin; Alexander Zemtsov, viola; Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt, cello (Naxos)

Brahms' Quartets, Op. 25 and 60 for piano, violin, viola, and cello are not



Debussy: Four-Hand Piano Music, Vol. 2: *Prélude a l'Après-midi d'un faune*, *La Mer*, *Images* – Chauzu, Armengaud (Naxos)

As they did several years ago in Vol. 1 of Debussy's four-hand piano music, Jean-Pierre Armengaud and



Ralph Vaughan Williams: *The Lark Ascending*, rarities (Naxos)

Salvatore di Vittorio and the Chamber Orchestra of New York serve up a program of (mostly) rare delights by Ralph Vaughan Williams that we ought to hear more often. First up is a

the easiest works in the repertoire to fathom in musical terms. Happily, they receive wonderful recordings, filled with equal measures of feeling and insight, in this Naxos release.

In Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor, Op. 25, the composer uses such simple means as a descending scale and several four-note motifs to build a structure on a symphonic scale. In place of the usual scherzo, he inserted a more problematical Intermezzo, further proof that he was thinking symphonically. The Andante is unusual in that it has a march in 3/4 time, reminiscent of Schumann, at its center. The finale is the famous Hungarian Rondo (*Rondo alla zingarese*) which, with its piano pyrotechnics and its well-paced final accelerando, its marked rhythms and its double stops in the viola that enrich the harmony, further enlarge the scope of the music.

Piano Quartet No. 3 in C minor, Op. 60 had its origin in a piano quartet in C-sharp minor that Brahms' wrote in the difficult times surrounding the final illness and death of his mentor, Robert Schumann. He recreated the work eighteen years later in 1874, retaining and revising music from the first movement and scherzo. The mood of the opening movement seems to recall that dark time. Indeed, the C major piano octave and the melancholy descending motif in the strings at its opening are as chilling as anything in Brahms.

The Scherzo, more resolutely driven than such a movement any right to be, shows us that the mood of the opening has not been dispelled. In the Andante, the strikingly moving melody introduced by the cello and later joined by the violin, helps to further the process of consolation. The finale, *Allegro comodo*, flirts tantalizingly with a re-establishment of the C minor key (a four-movement work was *not* supposed to finish in the minor) before ending on C major chords.

Three Russians and a German – Barakhovsky, Zemtsov, Nebolsin, and Schmidt – contributed to these fine performances. All have very active careers on the international

Olivier Chauzu give revealing and illuminating performances of their subject. In the earlier release, they presented comparative Debussy rarities (*Épigraphes antiques*, *Petite Suite*). This time, they serve up some of the composer's best-known symphonic music in four-hand arrangements. That's to the good as well as the not-so-good.

First, the drawback. In a work like *Prélude a l'Après-midi d'un faune* it's hard for two pianists to obtain the hazy, gauzy textures Debussy had in mind in the orchestral version that suggest the torpor of the afternoon and the restless wandering of sexual desire in the mind of the Faune. (Debussy's early audiences got the message!) On the positive side, when you aren't as beguiled by the sensuality of the orchestration, it is easier to discern the formal organization of the piece, including the way the main theme is presented four times and how it is set against an impassioned second theme. Far from being the harmonic miasma it at first appears, *Prélude* is actually very intricately organized.

La Mer was arranged for piano four-hands by Debussy himself, at his publisher's urging. The immediate commercial reason was to increase its public visibility, but composers often made arrangements of this sort for their own purposes to clarify the structural details of a work they were composing for the symphonic medium. Under the deft execution of Armengaud and Chauzu, it is easier to follow the cyclic theme set out in the opening movement "From Dawn to Midday on the Sea," the jocular nature of the *de facto* scherzo movement, "Play of the waves," and the insistent repetitions of rondo form in the finale, "Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea," that underscore the menace of the watery element.

Images is in three sections, *Gigues* (Jigs), *Ibéria* (Spain), and *Rondes de Printemps* (Round Dances of Spring). *Gigues* is a remarkably jerky, edgy evocation of Scotland (a country which Debussy, unlike Mendelssohn, never visited), while *Rondes* is more satisfying as a conjuring up of the joy of springtime

tone poem of 1902-03, *The Solent*. The allusion in the title, unfamiliar to American listeners, is nautical, referring to the strait lying between the Isle of Wight and the English mainland. A peculiar feature of this body of water is that it is subject to rare "double tides." That may account for the swelling musical phrase which is also found in "A Sea Symphony" from this same period: "And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships." That this gloriously harmonized phrase should prefigure a phrase in the composer's more famous work, and also that the skillful writing for clarinet and horn set against muted or divided strings should recall his Tallis Fantasia (1910, rev. 1919) speaks for the rich quality of this much-neglected work.

The single-movement Fantasia for Piano and Orchestra (1896-1902), with the talented young German pianist Sina Kloke as soloist, shows another side of VW's versatility as a composer. Dark, flinty music in the piano is initially set against a fulsome chorale-like melody in the orchestra, though later the piano is given some choice morsels to feed upon. (And what's the matter with *flint*, anyway? That humble member of the mineral kingdom is very useful for striking sparks to warm things up!) In fact, the virtuosic quality of the piano writing makes us regret that the composer penned only this sole work for piano and orchestra.

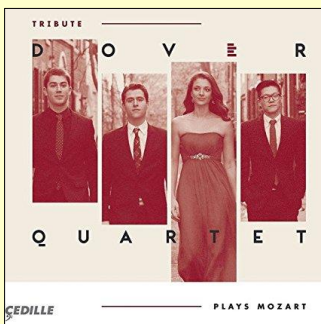
Kloke takes center stage in Six Short Pieces for Piano (1920), which has languished in obscurity for no good reason, though it was later arranged for string orchestra by another hand as Charterhouse Suite. Though they are eminently suitable for teaching purposes, these musical miniatures have enough substance to fill a recital spot on their own, with titles such as Quick Dance, Slow Air, and *Pezzo ostinato*.

The one item on the program that has *not* been lacking for friends all these years is The Lark Ascending for violin and string orchestra. It was inspired by the poem of that title by George Meredith which describes the unique habit of the skylark of singing as it soars in ever-wider circles: "He drops

scene, but they do not seem to have formally incorporated themselves as a performing trio. Maybe that's to the good, as they perform these works with all the freshness and passion of a new love or a new discovery. Lucky for us, they got together at the Wyastone Concert Hall, Monmouth, Wales, to make recordings in which their efforts were given top-notch support by producer Joe Kerr and engineer Andrew Lang.

that uses an actual French folksong for its second motif. Both make much of rhythmic tempos and colors rather than themes in the usual sense. *Ibéria* uses Debussy's own melodies, infused by actual Spanish rhythms, to spin the magic in its three sections: "By the Streets and the Highroads," "Perfumes of the Night," and "Morning of a Feast Day" capturing the essence of its subject.

the silver chain of sound of many links without a break In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake, all interwoven and spreading wide." That exactly describes how the music evolves in this incredibly beautiful work. Violinist Jennifer Pike is keenly aware of her instrument's vital role in introducing and linking each theme with delicate soliloquys. Her long fade-out at the very end is simply superb.



Mozart: String Quartets, K.589, 590; String Quintet, K.516 – Dover Quartet (Cedille)

The Dover String Quartet, consisting of Joel Link and Bryan Lee, violins; Milena Pajaro van de Stadt, viola; and Camden Shaw, cello, give the most auspicious first album release of any new string quartet I can ever recall. They have been carefully prepared. All of these young artists have Curtis Institute backgrounds, and they studied individually with the members of the Guarneri quartet: Arnold Steinhardt, James Dunham, Michael Tree, David Soyer, and Peter Wiley, who succeeded Soyer as the cellist. They also studied or were coached by the likes of Joseph Silverstein and Pamela Frank, among others.

All of which would seem to imply the very strong influence on the Dover Quartet of their mentors, and for sure you can hear the echo of the Guarneri in their healthy textures, so robust that individual voices must take care not to have to muscle through to be heard, their vibrant tone, and their utter commitment to the music at hand. Two of the items on the present program, Mozart's late Quartets in B-flat major, K589 and F major, K590, were the very ones the Guarneri performed in their own debut album, way back when.

With the influence of so many strong-minded mentors, the Dover Quartet would seem to face the obvious danger of sounding too derivative, to the point of not developing their own style. The perfect democracy with which they share Mozart's abundant delights in these two works, plus a certain textural transparency resulting from it, would seem to bode well for their secure identity in a field in which string quartets, like marriages, often start to come apart after a few years. On the strength of these recordings, I feel that the Dover will prove to be a welcome exception.

The two quartets, even more than the earlier "Haydn" set of six, show Mozart at the height of his imagination and are astonishingly complex and forward-looking. K589, for instance, opens with an ear-catching falling triad instead of a rising figure. This procedure is very uncommon for Mozart, and it sets the mood for the entire work: wistful, elegant, and introspective. In his booklet notes, Camden Shaw characterizes the Larghetto as "trying to reach for something and then returning to rest." The Minuetto has brief excursions into the minor at around 3:23 and 4:32, reinforcing the prevailing mood even as it allows Mozart to indulge his sense of humor in its bubbling, chattering Trio. The finale, an Allegro in the form of a rondo, opens with a welcome air of festivity, which is soon overcome by tensions induced by brief but significant silences. At the end, a codetta restores a sense of innocent happiness.

K590 presents an interpretive quandary in its very opening, where the first bar is marked *piano* and the second *forte*. As Shaw explains cogently, the performers must decide whether or not this implies a crescendo, and also how to bring it about. A sudden (*subito*) forte in the second bar would have been a Beethoven innovation, and not in Mozart's style. The Dovers resolve the dilemma by blooming slightly in the opening bar and then playing more strongly than might have been expected in the second. It works like a charm! Incidentally, this figure, which conveys a sense of joy, serves unusually as both a pickup and a downbeat bar, a procedure Mozart repeats in the phrase structure of the Minuet, which is divided into two seven-bar phrases that serve the purpose of pickup and downbeat. The feeling is described by Shaw as "asymmetrical, as if something is amiss." Shocking mood changes between the playful dances and the intense passages that occur later on give this particular Minuet a kind of "bi-polar" character that is more than we have a right to expect from an elegant dance. Earlier, the second movement, Andante, served as a point of repose in which the pain and joy of existence seem to be in balance. The robust finale, which the Dovers play with considerable verve, features a development in which Mozart pulls the key up a half-step from C major to D-flat "without any connective tissue" (Shaw), another forward-looking procedure that must have raised eyebrows in its day.

Former Guarneri Quartet violist Michael Tree joins the Dovers at the end of the program in a compelling account of Mozart's String Quintet in C minor, K516b. As we often observe in quintets where the added instrument is a viola rather than a cello, the harmony tends to be enriched by intimate discourse among the inner voices. We hear it markedly in the duet of the two violas in the finale, where it breaks the consistently dark and oppressive atmosphere

of this movement. The other thing you need to know about this quintet is that it was a transcription of an earlier woodwind serenade, K. 406. Mozart, with his quick and prolific inventiveness, rarely took the time and effort to reimagine any work, but this one must have been particularly inviting to him. Its range of moods, “powerful, austere, and haunting” (Shaw) made it stand out in an 18th century genre that was supposed to be a pleasant, unobtrusive backdrop to a social occasion. Shaw talks at length about the “real danger” and “real pain” in the opening movement, the “raucous” character of the Minuet, and the sinister and mysterious nature of the finale – all qualities that a serenade was *not* supposed to possess. The Dover Quartet and Michael Tree do a wonderful job of realizing all the moods, biting as well as beautiful, troubling and consoling – in a work that ends, unexpectedly, in an outburst of joy that the previous events would scarcely have predicted. That’s Mozart for you! First-rate support from producer/engineer Judith Sherman in the sound booth captures the total commitment of a gripping performance.