



BEETHOVEN Piano Trios:
in C minor op.1 no.3, in B flat
major op.97 'Archduke'

Trio con Brio Copenhagen

ORCHID CLASSICS ORC 100101

**Beethoven the Romantic strains at the
leash in these spacious performances**

Recorded as if from above, with each member accorded their own space, Trio con Brio Copenhagen captures Beethoven as a Romantic in the making from the first bars of op.1 no.3. Its string-playing sisters deploy some discreet portamento and finely graded vibrato without recourse to the exaggeration that occasionally mars the more storied Faust/Queyras/Melnikov recordings on Harmonia Mundi. The expansive first movement gathers intensity during its development section and puts on the armour of light that would be worn to such revolutionary effect five years later in the First Symphony. I like the minuet's teasing accents and Jens Elvekjaer's pearly right-hand flourishes – he's playing a modern grand, but you could confuse it for a drawing-room fortepiano in the Mendelssohnian trio. The finale fairly leaps out of the blocks: here is the sound of the 18th century straining at the seams.

Considered purely as trio playing, the 'Archduke' enjoys no less sophisticated, stylistically up-to-date execution: there is no obvious leader in an ensemble of such alert and creative musicians. I miss, however, a sense of the work's scale, notwithstanding generous tempos in the first three movements which climax in a deeply felt Andante cantabile. Here, perhaps, the recording keeps us at arm's length, emphasising the Trio's care over



beautifully finished details of texture rather than taking in broader horizons. For those, turn to Oistrakh and friends – but for Beethoven con brio, look no further.

PETER QUANTRILL

BEETHOVEN String Quartets
op.18: no.4 in C minor, no.5 in
A major, no.6 in B flat major

Eybler Quartet

CORO COR16174

**Perfectly capturing the astringency
of Beethoven's first-period quartets**

The Eybler Quartet launches into the second half of op.18 with the same high-tensile energy and deftly articulated precision (captured in imposingly tactile sound) that marked its first release in the series (Coro 16164). The opening movement of the *Sturm und Drang* C minor Quartet inflicts every musical body-blow with a terrifying, rapier-like thrust. The following Andante is likewise sounded with restless, probing introspection before the Menuetto storms away with a headlong urgency that thrusts aside the gentility of the late-18th-century ballroom.

Most quartet ensembles create a smiling sense of radiant cantabile as Beethoven launches the fifth in the series with one of his most carefree melodies. The problem is that the composer promptly turns his back on it with a game of thematic ping-pong, intended to dispel quickly any sense of allure. By keeping that magical opening free of succulent vibrato, the Eyblers integrate Beethoven's sudden change of creative direction without a sense of stubbing one's musical toes. With its occasional Mozart-in-Beethovenian-overdrive invention,