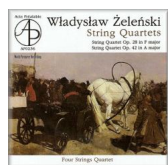


Żeleński - String Quartets (2011)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 03 March 2017 13:28 -

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String Quartet in F major, Op.28 (before 1885) [36:15] 1.1. *Allegro* 2.2. *Andante Con Variazioni* 3.3. *Scherzo: Allegro Con Brio* 4.4. *Allegro Molto Con Brio*

String Quartet in A major, Op.42 [35:13]

5.1. *Allegro Con Brio* 6.2. *Intermezzo: Allegro Non Troppo E Scherzando* 7.3. *Molto Cantabile* 8.4. *Allegro Molto Vivace*

Four String Quartet: Fiedukiewicz Lucyna, 1st violin Witek Grzegorz, 2nd violin Raszewska Beata, viola Tudzierz Łukasz, cello

Żeleński is one of a number of Polish composers championed by this label though he's one of the more circumscribed compositionally. Born near Cracow he studied there and in Prague and Paris. Back in Cracow he began a distinguished pedagogic career - succeeding Moniuszko as composition teacher - before moving to an even more distinguished position in Warsaw. He was soon back in Cracow however and was eventually to become Director of the Music Conservatoire. So, a strong academic pedigree and clearly an important teacher – his most famous pupil was Zygmunt Stojowski. The foregoing derives from my review of his piano works on this label.

The two quartets here are not dated with any certainty in the booklet notes, which are rather skimpy in any case when it comes to matters compositional and analysis of the works. The earlier F major is dated to 'before 1885' when it was published. It's in four conventional movements. The first has plenty of flurry but no great melodic distinction, whereas the second movement is rather more interesting. It's a theme and variations, and the theme is recognisably Polish — not something that could be said of the ensuing Scherzo. The first violin is taken high over a loquacious, pizzicato-laced accompaniment and even when there are urgent, indeed military, calls to arms, it keeps sailing seraphically onwards. The fugal feints are knowing, and the hints of Brahms in both tonal density and syntax evident. The genial, bright finale has strong unison sections contrasting with more light-hearted material, and the earlier delayed fugal section duly appears.

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The A major quartet was dedicated to Joseph Joachim, though it's not disclosed whether his quartet played it. Its opening is rather more tautly argued than the earlier work, with an elastic urgency and some folkloric drone underpinning. These reappear in the very charming Intermezzo, forming a chain of links and resonances that mean that this work ranks decidedly higher than its companion in terms of construction. The considerable warmth of the slow movement comes perhaps as something of a shock, after the earlier writing, but it is undeniable. The melodic inspiration is high, albeit tinged with a slightly salon sentiment — which is not intended to be dismissive. The reprise, after an urgent B section, is genuinely lovely. The finale releases the tension with a degree of engaging ebullience.

The performances are good, though I can imagine that a brisker tempo in the finale of the F major might be advantageous. ---Jonathan Woolf, musicweb-international.com

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